Fic title: A Devil to Help Me Get Things Right
Author name: _doodle
Artist name: naisica
Genre: RPS AU
Pairing: Jared/Jensen (with Jared/Sandy and past Jensen/Danneel)
Rating: NC-17
Word count: 72,000 (give or take)
Warnings: Jensen being a dick, a blink and you miss it bit of het porn, and Danneel being awesome.
Summary: *It was in moments like this that Jensen knew that they would be together forever. Nothing would or could break them apart*. Jensen was wrong. At 19 he was in love with Jared, full of plans and hopes for their future. He didn't count on dropping out of college and driving Jared away with cheating and drinking being part of them. At 30 Jensen wakes up with retrograde amnesia, his last memories of being 19 and happy. As he struggles to regain his memory and find out who he is, Jensen has to face the harsh truths of who he became and how he treated Jared. Determined not to make the same mistakes again, Jensen starts to get his life back on track and try to win an engaged and angry Jared back.
Author's Notes: This fic was going to be my Big Bang 2008, but in the end it stalled less than a thousand words in and I ended up having a LOT of fun writing last years. Between the end of last years Big Bang and the sign ups for this one I thought more and more about this idea which was still in the back of my mind, having not much done about it. So

I started from scratch and really let this idea run riot in my head and I must say I have *really* enjoyed writing this, even if it was a massive challenge at times. Thanks to **wenchpixie** who's general - you need to write more of that! - got me believing people might actually want to read this, and has put up with months of me texting her from work about the progress of this fic.
Finally, thank you to **ambiguous_opal** and assuring me that yes, it did make sense and **twofourteen** for the excellent beta job and making this less terribly British.
♥

|| Part One || Part Two || Part Three || Part Four || Part Five || Part Six || Part Seven || Part Eight & Epilogue ||

Big Bang 2009 || Part One

“Jared,” Jensen moaned as he leaned back into the solid weight of Jared’s chest. His fingers were warm against the skin of Jensen’s hips as they worked their way under the worn cotton of Jensen’s Led Zeppelin tee.

“Shh,” Jared hushed into Jensen’s ear, breath hot and damp, “You’ll wake the neighbors.”

Jensen could feel Jared’s grin as he moved downwards. His lips dotting kisses behind Jensen’s ear before sharp teeth dragged their way down Jensen’s exposed neck, finishing with a bite to that spot that made Jensen shudder with desire. “Jared,” Jensen said again, this time barely more than a whimper. “Keys. Inside. Now.”

Jared laughed into Jensen’s neck, breath ghosting over the bite mark that still tingled as Jensen fumbled for his keys, trying and failing to get them both inside the apartment.

“What did you say about inside?” Jared said as he stopped him, large hand curling around Jensen’s wrist while the other skated its way across Jensen’s waist, palming the firm flesh of his stomach before dipping down into his pocket. Jared’s fingers stretched deep into the denim, flexing just enough to make Jensen hiss with the briefest of touches, before they wrapped around the keys and tugged them free.

Jared crowded Jensen forward, getting even more into his space, the hard line of his dick obvious as it pressed into the curve of Jensen’s ass. Jared’s hips flicked forward and Jensen pushed back to meet him, sparks of heat firing up Jensen’s spine as Jared ground into him, proving he was just as turned on as Jensen. It was still as much of a rush as it was when they first started this, being together, the knowledge that of all the people Jared could have chosen, it was Jensen he picked. Always would be and he could still do this to Jared, make him want Jensen as much he wanted, *needed*, Jared.

Jensen whimpered again, unable to stop himself at the feel of Jared behind him laughing

as his fingers spider walking their way along the waistband of Jensen's jeans. Jensen slumped against Jared, letting his boyfriend hold him up as his free hand fed the key into the lock and turned it until it clicked and the door swung open.

"You're a mean drunk," Jensen gasped, breath hitching as Jared pushed him into the apartment, grinding into Jensen's ass again as they moved. "I ever tell you that?"

"Don't pretend you don't love it when I tease," Jared said into Jensen's ear, voice low and rough with obvious desire, rocking his hips into Jensen once again. Jensen ground back, meeting Jared's hips with his ass, and savored the hitch in Jared's breath and the low growl that followed it.

Jared kicked the door shut behind them and dropped the keys to the floor with a crash before both hands curled around Jensen's hips, holding tight. "Naked. Now." Jared demanded before biting down on Jensen's neck, hard enough to mark, but Jensen didn't care. His hand scrabbled behind him, desperate to pull Jared closer, to be able to touch and feel and strip.

Frustrated with the angle, with Jared having all the control Jensen pulled himself out of Jared's arms and let all the tension and desire that had been building in him all evening snap. They hit the closed apartment door with a thump and Jared let out a long whoosh of breath that smelled like a mix of pot and beer. Jensen stole away any complaints with lips on lips, kissing Jared hard. Jensen's hands fumbled at Jared's waist, one hand pushing up and under his tee while the other struggled with his belt.

As Jensen nipped at Jared's bottom lip, he received a moan in reply and licked into Jared's mouth, hot and needy. Jensen chased the taste of Jared under beer and whiskey, barbeque and pot. Jared radiated heat under Jensen's touch as he pushed Jared's tee higher, teeth bumping as they kissed, all desperation and need, no finesse. Not that Jensen cared, it was Jared and that was enough. All that mattered was getting them naked and Jared's dick inside of him.

"What were you saying about naked?" Jensen ground out between gasped breaths and kisses, tugging Jared's tee over his head.

"It's totally a good idea," Jared huffed before pulling Jensen back to him and into a kiss so hard it bruised. Jensen curled his fingers into the long shaggy hairs at the back of Jared's neck, as he fought back with kisses made of bites and teeth and pressure. Jensen moaned in Jared's mouth, loved it when he got this aggressive and pushed his hips into Jared's, rubbing their dicks together through the thick layers of denim between them.

Jared's fingers worked at Jensen's jeans, popping the button on his third attempt before he eased the fly down, the rush of cool air that hit Jensen's dick sent a shudder up his spine. "Do you ever wear underwear?" Jared asked as he nipped his way along Jensen's jaw line, five o'clock shadow scratching against Jensen's cheek as Jared sucked a hickey under his ear.

“Don’t act like you don’t love it, all that…,” Jensen trailed off into a low moan as Jared’s hand eased inside the open space of his jeans, and long fingers, hot and damp with sweat curled around his dick.

“All that what?” Jared asked, the tip his tongue tracing around the shell of Jensen’s ear, following the curve of the sensitive flesh as he spoke. Jensen couldn’t hide the shiver it sent down his spine or the way his hips pushed up into Jared’s hand, desperate for more touch, for movement.

“Easy access,” Jensen gritted out, hips pushing forward again.

“You could be right about that,” Jared said and Jensen didn’t like how calm his voice sounded, even if the press of his dick hard against Jensen’s hip gave him away.

“Wouldn’t do it if I wasn’t,” Jensen said breathily before leaning up to kiss Jared again, gripping at his shoulders tightly to hold himself up as Jared started to stroke his dick. Long, slow strokes, that had Jensen shaking and desperate for more, just enough to tease but barely enough to take the edge off the heat that was building in his belly and moving lower.

“Please,” Jensen breathed into Jared’s mouth, teeth bumping as he tried to get closer to Jared, chasing his tongue back into Jared’s mouth.

Jared hummed into Jensen’s mouth, free hand shucking Jensen’s jeans down around his thighs to give him more space to move. Jared worked up and down Jensen’s dick, with long firm strokes and a flick of the wrist at his head. Jared knew exactly how to make Jensen weak at the knees and coming in minutes, and this was it. All Jensen could do was cling onto Jared’s shoulders as the heat built in his stomach, tightening and tensing his entire body until he was panting and coming over Jared’s hand, hips fucking into his fist.

Jensen dropped his head to rest it against Jared’s chest, panting hard against the miles of golden skin that made Jared so irresistible, as he waited for his heart to slow down and the endorphin rush to ease. Jared’s fingers ran through Jensen’s hair, rubbing soothing circles into his scalp and the back of his head until Jensen pulled himself together enough to lean up and kiss Jared softly.

“God, I love you,” Jensen whispered against Jared’s lips. He shimmied his jeans down to his ankles then kicked them off along with his boots. Time to show Jared just what he did to him in return.

Grinning, Jensen slid down Jared’s body and onto his knees, popping the button and unzipping his fly with deft hands. Jensen leaned forward and dotted soft kisses to Jared’s stomach, firm under his lips, all the time he spent working out was paying off.

“Oh hell yeah,” Jared moaned, his head rolling back and hitting the apartment door with a

thump.

Jensen scraped his teeth down Jared's treasure trail and curled his finger around Jared's hips as he thrust forward, demanding touch without words. "Patience," Jensen breathed as he nosed at Jared's dick, smirking at the way it made him twitch and shake under his hands.

Jensen tightened his grip on Jared's hips as he lapped at the head of his dick, taking his time to tease with ghosts of breath, soft kisses and gentle scrapes of teeth. Jared keened above Jensen as he brought his hands onto Jensen's head, his fingers flexing in his hair.

"Tease," Jared rasped and tightened his grip further on Jensen's hair, tugging him forward.

Jensen huffed out a laugh and licked a long, low stripe up the length of Jared's dick. "Payback's a bitch, huh?" He asked before wrapping his lips around Jared's dick, swallowing him down just to hear Jared scream before he moved up and down his length with lips and tongue. Sucking at the head of Jared's dick Jensen lapped up the salty drips of precome and worked the bundle of nerves just below with the tip of his tongue until Jared was shaking and cursing under his touch.

"Jen, Jen, Jen," Jared chanted low and breathy, between pants and gasps, his fingers pulled hard at Jensen's hair as his hips fucked forward into Jensen's mouth. Jared was close, Jensen could feel the tension in his body, the tightness of his muscles and desperation in his voice, so took him in deep and hummed around him until Jared came with a sharp jerk of his hips and a shout of Jensen's name.

If Jensen could have grinned he would have, instead he let Jared palm at his head as he swallowed Jared's come and worked him through his orgasm. Pulling away Jensen slumped back onto his haunches and wiped off a stray drip of come from his the corner of his mouth before licking his lips.

"Dude," Jared panted as he smiled down at Jensen, grin sloppy and fucked out. "Get up here, I want a kiss."

Jensen laughed, light and easy as he pulled himself up to stand, pressing himself up against the length of Jared, who grinned like an idiot and said, "Hi."

"Hi," Jensen grinned back in reply, brushing his lips against Jared's in a gentle kiss. "Remind me to let you get drunk and worked up more often," Jensen laughed, cupping Jared's face, thumb stroking over his bottom lip.

Jared smirked and sucked Jensen's thumb into his mouth, nipping at the pad before releasing it. "Oh, I'm not done with you yet Jensen Ackles."

"Really?" Jensen titled his head a little, trying to stop the pleased grin that wanted to

escape onto his face as Jared gripped his hips and pulled them together, making his dick twitch with renewed interest against Jared's.

"Really," Jared said, shucking off his flip-flops and jeans before he pushed himself away from the apartment door, dipping his head to kiss Jensen.

Jensen wrapped himself around Jared, fingers curling into his shoulder and his hair as Jared's tongue worked past his teeth, searching out the taste of himself. Jensen moaned low and throaty into Jared's mouth as he stumbled backwards, refusing to break contact with Jared, continuing the kiss as they moved through apartment. Jared guided them around the couch and past the kitchen towards Jensen's bedroom, where there was a bed and lube and clean sheets.

Jensen's feet tangled with Jared's as they staggered through the door into the bedroom and Jared used Jensen's loss of balance to push him back onto the bed. "Shirt off," Jared ordered, eyes getting dark again with want and his dick hardening between his legs, making Jensen's whole body thrum with *want*.

Jensen obeyed and sat up, pulling his tee over his head and throwing it onto the floor, eyes never leaving Jared as he walked around to the other side of the bed. He searched through Jensen's bedside cabinet until he pulled out a tube of lube and dropped it on the bed.

"Gonna fuck me?" Jensen practically purred. He crawled across the bed to where Jared stood beside it and kissed his way up Jared's body until he was on his knees, lips hovering so close to Jared's he could feel his breath.

"Gonna beg?" Jared asked in reply, with the glint in his eye that Jensen knew meant he was going to have a good time.

"Gonna make me?" Jensen baited and it worked. Jared smashed their lips together hard and bit down on Jensen's bottom lip until they tasted blood. Jensen moaned as Jared licked at the wound and nipped, gently this time, before pulling away.

"On the bed, on your hands and knees," Jared instructed, commanding but not aggressive and it sent a hot flash of desire through Jensen, all the way down to his balls.

Jensen followed Jared's command, felt the shift of the bed behind him under Jared's weight and waited for the feeling of cool lube coating one of Jared's obscenely long, but fucking fantastic fingers as it pressed inside of him. What he didn't expect was Jared's hands on his ass, spreading him open, and the hot flash of Jared's tongue over his hole.

"Holy fuck!" Jensen almost screamed as his dick began to spring to attention and Jared continued his ministrations.

He started with long swipes of tongue over Jensen's hole and teasing flicks of the tip,

barely pressing inside, making Jensen keen in desperation for something, anything more. Jared traced patterns with his tongue over Jensen's skin, dotted kisses over his entrance and darted out of the way whenever Jensen's hips pushed him back, trying to get more.

"Don't tease," Jensen gritted out, fingers tightening in the bed linen as Jared's tongue flicked inside him, the short spark of desire it sent through him not enough.

"Gotta beg if you want me to fuck you, you remember that?" Jared said before biting down on the curve of Jensen's ass hard enough that Jensen wouldn't be surprised if he drew blood.

Jensen hissed as Jared lapped the wound leisurely, "Put your money where you mouth is Padalecki, and make me."

"That a challenge?" Jensen could hear the grin in Jared's voice and the cocky tone that meant he was going to do his best to make sure Jensen regretted it.

"I think it was." Jensen was all for it and so was Jared.

Jensen dug the heels of his palms into the mattress for leverage as Jared's tongue pressed inside him, the wet heat made Jensen's whole body thrum with want. As Jared stretched Jensen open with his lips and tongue, teased and tasted, Jensen bit his lip, torn between pushing up into Jared's touch or pushing down and trying to get some friction from the bed on his dripping, aching dick.

Then Jared started to play dirty and pressed one of his long fingers, slick with lube inside of Jensen beneath his tongue, curling upwards to stroke his prostate. "Fuck," Jensen cursed as Jared's finger worked slow and steady swipes over his prostate before sliding another in, stretching him open with fingers and tongue, as the heat pooled and sparked in Jensen's belly with each teasing touch to his prostate.

Jared replaced his tongue with a third finger and kissed his way up Jensen's spine until his breath was hot against Jensen's neck as he pressed against Jensen's prostate again, making him gasp and whimper with need. "Ready to beg yet?"

"You wanna have sex with anything other than your hand before Christmas?" Jensen groaned, fucking back onto Jared's fingers.

"When you put it like that," Jared rasped as he eased his fingers from Jensen, letting out a low chuckle at the whine Jensen couldn't stifle at the loss of Jared inside him.

Jensen rolled over on the bed and spread his legs wide for Jared as he stroked his dick slowly, watching as Jared did the same, slicking himself with lube. Anticipation pulsed through Jensen as he demanded, "Hurry the fuck up."

"Patience is a virtue, you know," Jared said, voice breathy as he settled on top of Jensen

and he curled his leg around Jared's hip, pulling him in.

"Come on, Jay, fuck me," Jensen panted, dragging Jared down for a kiss that was sloppy and wet, but it didn't matter because Jared was pressing into Jensen, one smooth stroke until he was inside and wrenching his mouth from Jensen's, gasping for air.

"Oh god, Jen," Jared breathed into Jensen's neck, hips still, waiting.

"Move," Jensen demanded, arms wrapping around Jared's shoulders as he pushed his hips up, into Jared, desperate for more. "Come on Jay, move."

Jensen felt Jared's body trembling as he eased back out of Jensen, rocking back in slowly, teasing enough to make Jensen keen and shake with need. Jensen panted against Jared's lips, biting and kissing as he pushed his hips up, meeting Jared's lazy thrusts, demanding more.

As Jensen tightened his legs around Jared's hips Jared took the hint, fucking into Jensen. Jared set a rhythm hard and fast and Jensen moved with him, gasping into kisses as he met each thrust, body slick with sweat slipping against Jared's. Jensen's lungs burned with each stolen breath of air, as Jared moved inside of him, dick brushing his prostate and making Jensen shake and curse into Jared's lips.

Jensen could feel himself getting closer, the heat of orgasm pooling in his stomach as his muscles tensed, tightened around Jared, determined to pull him over the edge as well. Jared dragged his lips away from Jensen's and sucked in a large gulp of air, hips threatening to slow, to tease Jensen when we he was almost there.

Jensen wasn't going to have any of that. "My turn," he grunted before using the small distance Jared had put between them to shove him off, and out of Jensen.

"Jen?" Jared spluttered in confusion, chest heaving as Jensen pushed him down onto his back, but that was as far as he got. Jensen moved fast, climbing onto Jared, knees pressing down into the bed beside his hips as Jensen lowered himself down onto Jared's dick, breath hitching at the feeling of Jared so deep inside him.

"Yes," Jensen hissed, rolling his hips experimentally before riding Jared in earnest. Fucking down hard on Jared's dick Jensen took one of Jared's hands and wrapped it around his dick, urging him to jerk Jensen off, hard and fast. *Almost there.*

As Jared's hips thrust up, meeting Jensen's movements, Jared's mouth started going, a sure sign that he was close. Streams of praise and curses falling from his lips in gasps and shouts as his hips faltered, snapping up one, twice, before coming inside Jensen.

That and Jared's fingers tightening around Jensen's dick was all it took to make him snap, grinding down onto Jared's dick as everything flashed white with pleasure and Jensen came over Jared's hand and stomach. Shaking with aftershocks of pleasure,

Jensen collapsed forward onto Jared's chest, kissing and licking at the sweat-drenched skin between long draws of breath.

When Jared's chest finally stopped heaving, his breathing settling to something near normal, Jensen pulled himself up to kiss Jared gently on the lips. "Love you," he said softly, letting Jared deepen the kiss until it was lazy and slow, making out at its best.

Coming up for air, Jensen climbed off Jared, hissing a little at the emptiness he was left with without Jared inside of him. As Jensen settled onto his back beside Jared, too fucked out to even care about cleaning up, Jared rolled onto his side, curling up against Jensen who fit his arm around his shoulders, pulling Jared in close.

"Love you too," Jared said softly, tilting his head up to brush his lips against Jensen's in a kiss that made his heart ache with love for Jared.

It was in moments like this that Jensen knew that they would be together forever. Nothing would or could break them apart.

*

The light behind Jensen's eyes was bright enough to sting through his closed eyelids. Jensen groaned and tried to bury his face into his pillow, shut out the daylight that was making the headache building behind his eyes and forehead start to pound.

"Jay," Jensen mumbled, hoping that Jared would get the hint and get up and shut the drapes. Why didn't they think to do that before they passed out, or hell, went out and worked on the epic hangover that was determined to make Jensen feel like shit?

Jensen tried to roll over, but the red-hot shot of pain that sparked through his skull stopped him. Jensen tried to remember the night before, hanging out at Mike's place, with beers, pot and video games, and what he did to make that morning hurt like a bitch.

As the noises started to filter into Jensen's awareness, voices and beeping, Jensen's head throbbed harder and he groaned again, cursing Jared. Jensen felt like crap and Jared was watching the TV, and loudly, he had to be the worst boyfriend ever.

Jensen started to grumble something to the same effect, when the light behind his eyes dimmed and a hand touched his forehead. Jensen pulled out of the touch, trying to ignore Jared saying his name and go back to sleep.

"Jensen!" Jared said again and Jensen groused to himself as he forced his eyes open against the burn of the light, but it wasn't Jared that came into focus.

It was a white tiled ceiling and a young woman, her outline fuzzy without his glasses, but he could make out a short blonde bob and thick-rimmed glasses. Jensen swallowed and realized his mouth was dry and tasted like ass, his teeth and tongue furry.

The panic started to rise as the woman said his name again, leaning over him to look into his open eyes while two of her fingers pressed against his wrist. It hit Jensen like a baseball bat to the stomach; she was a nurse. She was a nurse and that meant he was in hospital. Something had happened, something had happened to *him*.

Where was Jared? Was he okay? Was he in the hospital too? Why couldn't Jensen remember, what had happened after they'd fallen asleep?

"Jensen, can you speak?" The nurse asked, her voice calm but firm, demanding an answer. Jensen swallowed again, flexed his throat muscles before forcing the words out.

"What's happened? Where's Jared?" Jensen asked, frantic as he tried to sit up, find Jared. He needed to know where he was, if he was okay. If something had happened to him as well, Jensen didn't know what he would do, how he would cope. If he could cope.

"We think you were mugged, it looks like you hit your head on the curb. You were brought in by a friend," she explained, hand on his shoulder pressing firmly to keep him laying down.

If a friend brought him in, that had to be Jared, he had to be okay. Still, even though he knew he shouldn't Jensen couldn't stop himself from asking, "Jared? Was he hurt?"

"Your friend? No, he wasn't," she said shaking her head and checked the screens with his vitals and the bag of what must have been saline hanging beside him.

Breathing a long sigh of relief hearing that Jared was okay, that he'd not been hurt, Jensen's heart started to slow and as the adrenaline of fear started to wear off the throbbing in his skull started to return. "Can I see him? Jared, I mean, ask him what happened?"

The nurse shook her head again as she picked up his chart and started making notes on it, "Not right now, I'm afraid. The doctor needs to check you out first, then we'll see about visitors."

"Okay." Jensen bit his bottom lip and nodded, he hated hospitals. Had hated them ever since he was nine and Jared was eight, when Jared had fallen out of the tree in Jensen's garden and broken his arm for the first time of many. Ever since they meant nothing the but fear of losing Jared, of him being hurt, and now Jensen was trapped in this bed with a splitting headache, kept away from the one thing that could make everything alright in the world. Jared.

"Doctor Gamble will be in to see you shortly," she told him with a smile before she slipped out of the room, shutting the door behind her.

Jensen reached up to his head tentatively, hissing at the sharp stab of pain that ran

through hairline as his fingers found bandages and gauze. From the location of the pain Jensen and his bandages Jensen figured he must have needed at least a couple of stitches just above his left ear. Why couldn't he remember what happened? What he did after he and Jared went to sleep, fucked out and happy, wrapped up in each other's arms.

Jensen tried not to focus too hard on the clock on the wall; ticking away the long seconds as he waited for the doctor to arrive and hopefully start to make things make sense. The room was like any other hospital room, small and stark white, and the smell of antiseptic was overpowering in Jensen's nose.

Jensen fingered the sheets pooled at his waist, tugging at the material in hopes that his doctor would just hurry up, that he could have answers, that Jared would walk in and explain what happened. Sneak him a kiss and make everything okay.

After what seemed like hours, but the clock said was a little over nine minutes, there was a small tap at the door before it opened and a woman in a white coat stepped in. She had dark curly hair and was smiling from what Jensen could tell through the unfocused haze that was his vision without glasses.

She crossed the room to his bed, picking up his chart from where it hung on the end before coming around to stand next to Jensen at head of the bed. "Let's get you sat up, shall we?" She said, helping Jensen to sit up and lean forward, his head spinning a little as he did, before adjusting the bed below him so he could sit upright.

"That any better?" She asked, fussing with his pillows until he stopped fidgeting, as close to comfortable as he figured he was going to get.

"Yeah, thanks…I don't suppose you have my glasses, do you?" Jensen asked, blinking up into her face, trying to bring the blur of features into some sort of focus.

"They should be in here," she answered, opening the top drawer of the table next to Jensen and looking inside. "I'm afraid they need a bit of a clean, but they should see you through for now," she apologized as she handed them to him.

Once he had them on his face, everything snapped back into focus with a couple of blinks, revealing the pretty, but kind face of what he assumed must be his doctor. "Thank you."

"You're welcome, Jensen. Now for the introductions, I'm Doctor Gamble. I'm going to be taking care of you for the moment," she gave Jensen a reassuring smile before turning her attention to his chart in her hands, flicking it open and scanning the contents.

Jensen waited until she was finished and he had her full attention again to ask the questions that he needed answers to the most, the ones that were threatening to overwhelm him with rising panic.

“I’m confused, I don’t know what happened… Where am I?”

“You’re in the hospital, you were in an accident and you hit your head pretty hard,” She explained, “I’m here to check you out.”

“An accident, I don’t remember?” Jensen frowned, while an accident made sense, explained the injury to his head, how did it happen. When did it happen? Why wasn’t there any trace of it, or the lead up to it in his memory? Jensen felt like he was stranded in someone’s life, so confused and missing so much that must be important.

“That’s not unusual with head trauma, you may never remember the incident,” she said her voice calm and reassuring. “It’s one of the ways that the brain protects itself from trauma.”

“I don’t remember getting here…” Jensen said frustrated that there was nothing. That the only thing he could remember was going to sleep with Jared wrapped in his arms, the sweat cooling on their skin under the comforter, the smell of sex still heavy in the air.

“I’m not surprised; you’ve been out for a couple of hours and sometimes the memory loss can extend past the immediate trauma. I know it must be scary for you, having the gap in your memory, but it’s normal and it’s nothing to be overly concerned about. Trying to force the memories to return won’t help.”

“Out? What do you mean I’ve been out?” While her words may have been true and said with the best intention to comfort and ease, they did little to settle Jensen and the churning in the pit of his stomach.

“Yes,” Doctor Gamble confirmed, flicking open Jensen’s chart again, eyes moving down the pages of notes. “The admitting doctor had to sedate you.”

“Sedate me? Why?” Sedation with a head injury, wasn’t that dangerous? What had happened, what had Jensen been doing to force them to sedate him long enough to keep him out for hours? Bile rose in the back of Jensen’s throat, fear and frustration and not knowing what he’d done, whether he had even been in control of his own actions.

“According to the report from you admitting doctor, you were very agitated when you were brought in. The gentleman who brought you to the ER said he found you in your apartment, on the floor, covered in blood and coming in and out of consciousness. So he brought you in. When you got here, you were very adamant that you didn’t need any treatment.”

Jensen nodded, taking in her worlds, calm and clinical, offering no comfort with the facts. It had to be Jared that brought him in, if he was found in the apartment it couldn’t have been anyone else. Jensen bit his bottom lip, wished he could see Jared just to talk to him, to tell him that he was okay and everything was going to be alright. Finding Jensen that way must have scared the shit out of him, Jensen knows the affect it would have had on

him. Knows it well after three hospital trips with Jared since they stared dating, even more before.

Doctor Gamble continued, “The medical team were concerned that you were going to hurt yourself further if they didn’t intervene, so you were sedated. I’m glad to see that it’s given you some time to cool off.”

Hurt him? They were concerned that he would hurt himself? The bile in Jensen’s throat rose a little higher, what was he doing when he was brought in? How could he have been acting that way, that wasn’t him, wasn’t what he was like. He wasn’t his dad. “I don’t…. I don’t remember, that isn’t… I wouldn’t do that.”

“Head injuries mixed with alcohol can cause people to react very differently in situations of stress to how they would normally,” She assured, putting her hand on his shoulder to give what he figured was supposed to be a comforting squeeze. It didn’t help.

“You seem perfectly fine now, and coherent, which is positive. But I still need to check you out and ask you some questions and then we can see about getting you released after a couple more hours of observation.” Doctor Gamble told him, pulling a pen out of her pocket to start noting down his vitals from the monitors beside his bed.

“Am I going to be okay?” Jensen asked as she flashed her penlight in and out of his eyes, watching his reactions closely before putting it away and making several more notes on his chart.

“I should think so. Once you were sedated, you were given a CT scan to ensure that you didn’t have any bleeding or swelling in your brain and everything seemed normal. My main concern right now is the localized memory loss of the events since last night and the possibility of concussion, but both are normal with this level of head injury. You’re lucky you didn’t do yourself any more damage, Mr Ackles.”

Jensen flinched at the use of Mr Ackles, the discomfort enough to briefly distract him from the situation he was in. “Please, it’s Jensen. Call me Jensen, Mr. Ackles is my dad.”

“Okay Jensen,” She agreed with a warm smile and flicked over a few pages on the chart. “Let’s start with some simple questions. Your full name, please?”

“Jensen Ross Ackles.”

“Your date of birth?”

“March 1st 1978.”

“Good.”

“Current President of the United States?”

“Bill Clinton.”

“Excuse me?” Doctor Gamble asked, her brows furrowing, though Jensen couldn’t think why.

“The president,” Jensen explained, even though he wasn’t sure why he had to. “It’s been Bill Clinton since ’93…” Then look on the doctor’s face didn’t look good, the confusion even more prominent than it was before. The churning in Jensen’s stomach returned, making him feel heavy with nausea. “Why?” He asked, almost afraid to.

“Jensen, can you tell me what date you think it is?” The serious tone in her voice did nothing to reassure Jensen or stem the rapidly rising tide of panic that threatened to drown him. Clinton was the president, had been for as long as Jensen could remember politics mattering to him…what was going on? What was wrong with him?

“I guess it’s…February 15th,” Jensen answered. The night before had been Valentine’s Day, they’d partied with Mike, working each other up, desperate to get home together until they’d finally been able to leave. He couldn’t have lost more than a day, not from hitting his head. “The last thing I remember is going to sleep last night, on Valentine’s Day…”

Doctor Gamble couldn’t stop the panic that crossed over her face, and while she reined it in quickly, returning to calm professionalism, it was enough to make Jensen’s heart skip a beat. Something was wrong and it was something serious. “What’s going on?”

“And what year is it?” She pressed and Jensen answered, wanting answers. Something to relieve the fear that was spreading, cold inside his chest, clamping down on his heart and lungs, making it hard to breathe.

“1998… Can you tell me what’s going on, please, ‘cause you’re starting to freak me out!” Jensen didn’t care that he was begging or that his voice was shaking, he just wanted answers, for her to tell him what was going on, what was wrong, and fix it.

“Just one more question,” She said and Jensen wanted to tell her no, that she couldn’t ask any more questions until he had some answers, but he could tell from her face just how important she thought it was. He didn’t protest. “How old are you?”

“Nineteen…I’m twenty in like, two weeks.” Jensen answered and frowned hard, felt the lines etch into his forehead at her question. What did that mean…why was she looking at him like he’d lost his mind? “Why are you looking at me like I’m crazy or something.”

“Jensen, today’s date is November 1st and it’s 2008. You’re thirty years old,” she told him, her voice calm and her face serious.

“Wait? What? You’re shitting me right?” It had to be a joke. There was no way in hell

she could be serious. No fucking way. Like someone flicked a switch inside him the fear and concern turned into anger. How could someone mess with him like this? What kind of sick fuck would think this was funny. “This is some sort of sick joke right? Is someone videoing this? Has someone set me up for a TV show or what? Because this really isn’t funny.”

Jensen expected her to laugh, or apologize, or something. Not just stand there looking at him with sad eyes and lips pressed together into a thin line. She took a deep breath while a heavy weight settled in Jensen’s stomach…it wasn’t a joke. She was being dead serious.

“Jensen, what is the last thing you remember?”

“I…” Jensen’s voice shook, he swallowed and tried again, “I came home from a party…I went to bed.” Jensen figured it was close enough to the truth, he knew it wasn’t smart to out himself in a Texas ER, he remembered that much at least.

“And the date was?”

“February 14th, 1998…What date did you say it was again?”

“November 1st, 2008.”

“2008?”

“Yes,” she answered with a small nod.

“I’ve lost ten years…How do ten years just vanish? I only hit my head, how can I not remember the last ten years of my life? This isn’t possible, it can’t be. I can’t be thirty, I haven’t even finished college! There has to be something wrong, something must have caused this and you’re going to have to put it right. You’re going to find out what’s wrong with me and give me the last ten years back, because they can’t just be gone…This isn’t happening, this can’t be happening, this can’t be real.”

“Jensen, I need you to calm down, okay.”

“Calm down, you’re telling me that I’m suddenly missing ten years of my life and I’m supposed to be fucking calm!”

Jensen’s chest started ache and his throat felt tight, each breath was getting harder to take as fear and confusion overwhelmed Jensen’s senses, and he knew what it meant. Gripping the side of the bed he tried to breathe deep and long, stop the struggling hitches of breath that were rushing him head first into the familiar fear of a panic attack. They had started when he was a child, shy and nervous of everything, of his father’s shouting; they’d only eased to a stop after he’d met Jared, who had always talked him down. His voice calm and soothing in Jensen’s ear at the first signs of an attack, his hand rubbing

loving circles on his back until his breathing had steadied and head rush of too little oxygen passed.

“Jensen, you’re having a panic attack, you need to calm down and take deep breaths okay. In the nose and out through the mouth, nice and deep, okay?” Doctor Gamble talked him through as she put an oxygen mask up to his face, the gas slowly hissing out as he tried to follow her instructions. His breaths stuttered in through his nose and his heart pounded in his chest, how could this be happening to him. How could he lose ten years of his life? How could he be thirty fucking years old and not know it? It had to be some twisted, fucked up nightmare. As Jensen told himself that everything that was happening couldn’t possibly be real, that he’d wake up soon, his lungs started to burn with lack of oxygen and Doctor Gamble’s voice blurred to a low drone in the back of his awareness.

Then everything went black.

*

Jensen awoke to bright lights, the stench of antiseptic and Doctor Gamble leaning over him.

"Fuck," Jensen cursed into the oxygen mask now firmly secured around his head, over his mouth and nose. Jensen felt his chest start to tighten again, it wasn't a dream, it was all real and he was missing ten years and god knew what. He couldn't begin to grasp the enormity of it, just wanted it not to be true, and as his heart started to pound again and his breath hitched Doctor Gamble threatened to sedate him.

Waking up to that again was the last thing Jensen wanted, so he rested his back on his pillow and shut his eyes. Forcing long, deep breaths in and out of his lungs Jensen shut his eyes and willed himself to calm down. To grow the fuck up and deal with the doctor so he could he just get out of the hospital and home, let Jared take care of him and make everything alright.

When Jensen was finally sure that his body wasn't going to freak out on him again and stop breathing, he pulled the oxygen mask down off his face with shaky hands and looked at Doctor Gamble. "It's real isn't it?"

She nodded, looking a little sad as she said softly, "I'm afraid so, Jensen."

"It's not '98?" Jensen asked, the words sticking in his throat, not wanting to hear the answer. The truth.

"No, it's not."

"Why…?” Jensen couldn’t stop his voice, or his hands from shaking. What if he did this to himself, what if it was his fault but he couldn’t remember. How could he ever explain

that to Jared? That he lost the last ten years of their life together and he was guilty of causing it? Jensen wouldn't blame Jared if he never forgave him. "Why can't I remember?"

"I'm not an expert," she said with a sigh, pushing some stray hair behind her ear like a nervous twitch. "But it looks to me like you're suffering from retrograde amnesia. I'm going to have to refer you to a specialist and you're probably going to be here more than one night, I'm afraid."

"But...I've heard of people forgetting who they are…but...does this happen? People forgetting whole chunks of their life?"

"The brain is a complex organ and the memory even more so. How memory works isn't something that scientists or doctors fully understand yet, and amnesia is much the same. In this case, it's most likely caused by the head injury you sustained last night, but why it's manifested in this way isn't something I can answer."

Jensen swallowed hard, desperate to ask but afraid of the answer, still, he had to know the truth. "Is this permanent?"

"I'm sorry, but I can't say," she told him with a small shrug, looking genuinely pained by her answer. "In some people it is and some people it isn't. I'm not a specialist so I can only give you limited information, but you have to prepare yourself for the possibility that you may never recover all your memories."

Jensen nodded shakily, grabbing the bedding pooled at his waist until his knuckles turned white and he was able to speak again without choking up. "What happens now?"

"Now, I call a neurologist down who specializes in amnesia patients for a consult. Doctor Kripke will be able to assess your condition better than I can, given his experience in this field. I should imagine there will be more tests and you'll be admitted so you can be monitored, though for how long will be up to him." She gave him a squeeze on the shoulder, Jensen imagined that it was supposed to comfort it him, but it just made him stomach sink further. She pitied him and pity wasn't a sign of good things to come.

So Jensen nodded, even though he had asked the question he hadn't really been listening to the answer as much as the tone of her voice. How could this be happening? And why was it happening to him? It wasn't fair; he didn't do anything to deserve losing ten years of his life and what if it never came back? What if they kept him in the hospital for weeks, treating him like a new and interesting lab rat only to tell him they couldn't do anything for him? That he couldn't be fixed and he'd never remember.

"Jensen?" Doctor Gamble's voice interrupted his thoughts, stopping their rapid spiral into a slightly crazed panic. "Is there anyone you would like me to call, your phone was found in your pocket when you were brought in, so we should have access to up to date contact numbers."

“No, I just want to see Jared, if that’s okay.” Jensen didn’t care any more about homophobic Texans, about the possible repercussions, all he wanted was Jared. His whole world was collapsing around him and he needed the only person who could tell him that everything would be alright and he would believe. Just for a few minutes he wanted to be wrapped up in Jared’s arms and to feel safe, like nothing had changed.

“Jared?” Dr Gamble frowned and Jensen’s stomach clench in fear. Jared had brought him in, why was she frowning.

“We...live together, he brought me in,” Jensen explained, unable to stop his voice from trembling and suppress the bad feeling building so rapidly inside his chest it ached.

Her frown deepened as she flicked to the front of his chart, eyes scanning the yellow page before she answered. “Not according to your chart.”

“What?” Jensen’s heart stopped. It wasn’t Jared that brought him in? Then who was it and where was Jared? What if he had been hurt too, when Jensen hit his head and lost his memory? What if Jared hadn’t been found and was lying in a ditch somewhere? Jensen’s chest started to tighten again as the image of Jared lying in a gutter somewhere, unconscious and bleeding burned itself behind his eyelids and refused to be pushed away or shut out.

She looked down at his chart again before speaking, “It says here that you were brought in by a Mr. Christian Kane.”

As the panic wrapped a cold hand around Jensen’s heart he didn’t care who had brought in him, or why, all that mattered was finding Jared. Making sure that he was okay, that he was safe, and getting him there, to Jensen. Where he needed to be to make things right. “That doesn’t matter. Please, I need you to find Jared Padalecki and make sure he’s okay,” Jensen begged, not too ashamed when it came to Jared. “There can’t be that many other Padalecki’s here in San Antonio, especially ones that he’s not related to.” Jensen grabbed her hand, clung onto it as he pleaded. “Please, you have to find him for me.”

Doctor Gamble didn’t pull her hand away, just stood and stared at Jensen opened mouthed for a long moment before speaking, her voice soft as she broke the news: “Jensen, you’re not in San Antonio.”

“What?” Jensen choked out dumbly, the shock of it on top of everything else too much to take in, process and believe.

“You’re in Los Angeles. Cedar Sinai hospital, to be exact,” she told him as she watched him carefully.

Jensen knew she was waiting for a freak out, but it wasn’t coming. The news that he was in L.A not San Antonio anymore was enough to overload Jensen’s brain, numb him into

disbelief and confusion. He and Jared had talked about San Francisco, renting a place in the Castro, but never seriously and never LA. “What? How…how is that possible?” Jensen didn’t understand.

“Your driver’s license lists your address as an LA one, while you may not remember the move, it seems that this is where you live now.”

Jensen doesn’t care that he lives in LA now, that there was proof; all it did was reinforce how much Jensen needed Jared. Needed him there to explain and to comfort, to stop the heavy ache of nausea in the bottom of Jensen’s belly and kiss his fear away. “Jared’s number will be in my phone, please, will you call him? Tell him what’s happened and ask him to come?”

“Of course,” Doctor Gamble said with a nod, putting his chart back on the end of the bed before heading to the door. “If you need anything, just press the buzzer next to your bed and nurse will come and check on you,” she told him with a smile before slipping out, shutting the door behind her with a quiet snick.

Jensen laid his head back on the pillows, taking long shuddering breaths in and out, refusing to let another panic attack break through. Jared would be there soon, that was all that mattered, Jensen told himself. Jared would be there soon and then everything would be okay. He just needed to be patient and Jared would come and nothing else would matter.

Big Bang 2009 || Part Two

After what seemed like an eternity of waiting and trying to keep himself calm, the door finally snicked and Jensen opened his eyes in time to see it creep open and a guy in his thirties slip inside, Doctor Gamble behind him. The guy was dressed in jeans and a faded tee, with a red smear across the shoulder that Jensen presumed was blood. His face was pale and painted with worry as he pushed his chin length brown hair back off his face, blue eyes wide as he attempted a nervous smile.

There was something familiar about his face, though Jensen couldn't place it. Frustration burned hot and heavy at the bottom of his stomach as nothing but a black emptiness took the place of memories. Was this what it was going to be like until he got his memory back? If he got his memory back.

"Heya there, Jen," he finally spoke once he'd reached the side of Jensen's bed, stood awkwardly with his hands in his pockets. There was a deep Southern twang to his voice, Texas and maybe a little Oklahoma, and it was rough and deep, like too much whiskey and a pack of twenty at the end of game night. Somewhere, deep inside Jensen knew that lack of confidence was totally foreign to the man in front of him.

"This is Mr. Kane, the gentleman that brought you in," Doctor Gamble explained, keeping her distance from the pair of them, standing at the end of the bed, watching over them like she was waiting for some type of shit to hit the fan.

"Your doc told me what's happened…," they guy, Kane said, looking down at his shuffling feet for a moment before finally making eye contact with Jensen. "Do you remember me? Know who I am?"

Jensen shook his head, felt the burn of frustration and bile flare up into the back of his throat, and forced it down with a swallow. "No, though I'm guessing I should."

"We've known each other for about ten years," Kane said exhaling slowly, scratching the back of his head. "You really don't remember me? At all?"

Jensen shrugged, sinking back down into the hospital bed and curling his legs up close to him, the guilt of not knowing the man stood watching him expectantly overwhelming. "Your face, it's a little familiar, I think, but…I'm sorry, I don't remember you...I don't even remember your name."

"Chris. Chris Kane, we met at college."

"I…I think you were sophomore when I was a freshman...I think I remember seeing you around campus at a couple of parties," Jensen said, unsure of himself or his own memories, but the image was there. Chris' face, only younger and clean shaven, passing out of the music department as Jensen returned some sheet music he'd borrowed, and with a beer in his hand, talking to Mike's friend, the football kid, Tom, surrounded by Halloween decorations.

"We met at one of Mike's parties, you were pretty wasted and started playing my guitar," Chris explained with a strained smile and a small laugh. Maybe he did know Jensen after all, if he knew how drunk he had to be to play in front of anyone that wasn't Jared. "At the end of the night I helped carry you back to your apartment and you let me crash on your couch…we hit it off over coffee and toast and our bitching hangovers the next afternoon."

"I'm sorry," Jensen said softly, the guilt rising fast. The memory meant something to Chris, his nostalgia was easy to see in his telling, and it raised nothing in Jensen, no memory or emotion. Just an empty anger and sense of frustration. "But...I don't remember that."

"That was the last day before the Christmas vacation started, in '98."

"It seems that Jensen's memory currently only runs as far as February 1998, of course, we'll know more once he's been moved to a ward and has seen the specialist, Doctor Kripke," Doctor Gamble offered and Jensen was glad of the her intervention. Jensen didn't want to meet people he didn't remember, be made to feel guilty and like crap

because he had no recollection of who they were, or what they meant to him. Right now, all that mattered was Jared and Jensen figured he'd been patient long enough.

"It's nice to meet you, I think," Jensen said as firmly as he could to end the conversation, and turned to his doctor where she still stood at the end of the bed. "But Doctor Gamble, did you find Jared?"

"That's what I brought Mr. Kane in for, I couldn't find a number for any Jared's or Padalecki's in your phone, so I thought it best to ask your friend before I started with the L.A phone book. He has some news that I think it's important for you to hear."

Her words sat heavy on Jensen's shoulders, the fear and unease he'd felt earlier when he'd been unsure of Jared's safety came rushing back, flooding his system with panic. The soft tone of her voice, the sad look in Chris' eyes told him everything he needed to know, something was seriously wrong. Something had happened to Jared and he wasn't coming. Jensen's chest tightened again, rib cage aching with the effort of breathing as pain spiked through his skull, white spots dotting his vision as Doctor Gamble hurried to his side.

"Jensen, you need to calm down," Doctor Gamble said firmly, one had on his shoulder the other on his chin, forcing him to look up at her. "I know this is scary for you, but this isn't going to help you and I don't want to have to sedate you again."

Jensen screwed his eyes shut, focused on his breathing until it slowed to normal, until the flare of panic was suppressed, deep down in the bottom of his stomach, churning with the fear and uncertainty of what he was about to hear.

"Does he have a history of panic attacks that you're aware of?" Jensen listened to Doctor Gamble talk to Chris.

"Yeah, apparently he used to have them a lot as a kid. They started again about six years ago, I think he saw a shrink and they put him on something for them. Tranquilizers maybe, he always gets pretty out of it when he takes them."

Jensen listened to Chris' answer and couldn't believe it, that the attacks had started again. Jared had stopped them; he'd never needed medication or therapy, not when all he had to think about was a deep soothing voice and large, warm hands soothing up and down his back to bring him down. Knowing that they'd started again, that he had been medicated by a psychiatrist made the distress expand in his chest, until his ribcage ached with the pressure of it. Why hadn't Jared been there to stop them?

"I don't suppose you know the name of the psychiatrist, or the medication and dosage?"

"No, I'm sorry. He was never too big on sharing that kind of stuff with me, Jared might have known once, but not anymore."

"What happened to Jared? I want to know," Jensen demanded opening his eyes and

feeling his face flush with heat as he struggled to keep each breath even, deep and slow.

"I don't think it's a good idea," Doctor Gamble said to Chris, shaking her head and ignoring Jensen. "Not while he's in such an agitated condition. I don't want him to have another full blown panic attack. "

"No, I want you to tell me now." Jensen crossed his arms in agitation looking between Doctor Gamble and Chris, unwilling to take no for an answer when it came to finding out what had happened to Jared. Not after all the snippets of information that had fed the deadly fear, heavy in his stomach, that demanded he find out right that instant.

"Jensen, in my medical opinion-." Doctor Gamble began, but Jensen cut her off, through gritted teeth.

"I don't care about your medical opinion," he said before turning to Chris, pleading as his chest heaved. "Please, I need you to tell me what's happened to Jared."

"Not knowing isn't helping him and I'm not going to sit and watch him like this," Chris said across the bed to Doctor Gamble before turning his attention to Jensen, one hand coming out of his jeans pocket to rest on Jensen's shoulder. "Okay, Jen, I'm going to tell you."

"I just want to know where he is," Jensen said softly, shrugging out of the foreign touch.

"I don't know that, and as far as I know, neither do you," Chris told him, the sadness in his voice turning the anticipation into lead in Jensen's stomach. Heavy and sickening, and Chris took a deep breath before finishing. "Jensen, you and Jared split up, five years ago."

The whole world stopped.

It wasn't true. It couldn't be true.

They were happy and in love and the only thing they wanted from the future was each other. It wasn't possible, nothing could split them up. Nothing. Chris had to be lying. There was no way it could be the truth. Chris had to be wrong, or lying, it was the only explanation, the only thing that made sense. He couldn't imagine living a life without Jared in it, let alone actually having to do it, having done it for five years already.

"No," Jensen said, trying to be firm but his voice shook of its own accord.

"I'm sorry Jen," Chris said reaching for Jensen again, but he pulled out of his reach, not wanting anything from Chris. Not when he'd do this to Jensen, tried to make him believe that he'd lost Jared from his life.

"No, you're wrong," Jensen croaked. It didn't matter that Jared wasn't there, that Jensen

didn't have his number, it couldn't be true. Jared was his world.

"I remember how into him you were back in college and so you probably don't want to hear this, but I'm not wrong. You lived on my couch and drank all my booze for over a month when it was over."

"But we're…we were happy," Jensen stuttered out as all the air and fear and anger rushed out of him, leaving him with nothing but a gaping hole inside. The weight of nothingness, of knowing that it was all over, and he didn't know why or how, or remember the time he'd had with Jared since, was worse than the fear of the unknown.

"Ten years ago, yeah, you were," Chris said with a small, but sad nod. "But ten years is a long time, you both changed."

Jensen swallowed, listening to Chris' words but not really taking them in. They meant nothing, he'd lost Jared and it felt like he'd lost a limb, he was dumb with shock as he tried to process the idea of never seeing him again. Of what could have gone wrong and driven them apart when they'd been made for each other, inseparable since they were five years old and playing in the dirt in Jared's back yard.

"Why," Jensen finally managed to make himself ask. "Why did we split up?"

"That doesn't matter right now," Chris said and it did little to soothe Jensen. He knew there was more to it than Chris was letting on, could see it in his eyes, even though he didn't know how he knew. His gut told him it was true and he believed it.

"It does to me," Jensen replied, trying to stay calm, be rational and reasonable instead of demanding.

Chris shrugged, answering softly: "You weren't happy together anymore."

Jensen couldn't, wouldn't, believe it was that simple, that one day they just stopped being happy and gave up, "We didn't try to make it work?"

"Yeah, you did," Chris said with a nod, his eyes still guarded, like there was something he wasn't telling.

"And we still…?" Jensen tried to push, but he was unsure how to get the answers that he wanted, the answers that Chris apparently wasn't willing to give. Jensen would either have to wait or find out for himself as soon as he got out of the hospital.

Chris nodded solemnly, "I'm sorry, man, I really am. This cut you up pretty bad the first time, but you had to know."

There could only be so many Jared Padalecki's in LA, but Jensen didn't want to have to wait god knows how long until they released him and he could go and find Jared. If Chris

wasn't willing to tell Jensen the whole truth, then the least he could do was bring Jared to him. Let him ask what went wrong between them, why he'd lost the love of his life, beg him to stay in his life and not walk away. "I still want to see him."

"No," Chris answered immediately and firmly, just making Jensen's suspicions rise even further that there was something that Chris wasn't telling him, dragging a flare of frustration out of his confusion.

"That's not your choice to make, it's mine," Jensen argued back, not willing to back down. Jared was the only person that Jensen wanted to see, who he needed to get him through this, and there was no way he was just going to be told that it was over and accept it. No. He wouldn't just take Chris' word that it was over, that they had tried and failed. He needed to see Jared, hear it from him that they were over and be able to ask him why before he could believe it was true. That he let the best thing to ever happen to him go.

"All the time that you want me to hunt him down, then it is my choice. You don't remember the last five years, so just trust me on this one, okay?" Chris tried to reason, but Jensen refused to listen to anything but Chris denying him the help he needed.

"I don't even know you, why should I trust you?" Jensen lashed out, snapping with venom before he could stop himself. How could Chris claim to be his friend but refuse to do this for him? Refuse to bring him the man he was in love with, the person he needed the most.

"Because if it wasn't for me you'd probably still be passed out in your apartment, or worse, awake and not knowing what the hell was going on," Chris bit back, face creasing up in annoyance, cheeks coloring deep red.

"Mr. Kane," Doctor Gamble intervened, her voice stern enough to silence what ever Chris was about to follow up with, before she turned her attention back to Jensen. "Jensen, for the moment I'm going to have to insist that you trust Mr. Kane's judgment. One panic attack today is enough all round, I should think. Frustration is to be expected in this situation, but you must try not to lash out at the people who have your best interests at heart."

"Sorry, doc," Chris mumbled, but Jensen was not in the mood to be apologetic to the people who were keeping him in the dark.

"Well I'm not, what right does he have to keep my own life from me? Isn't it enough that I can't remember it without having the truth kept from me when I ask for it?"

Chris rolled his head back and groaned heavenwards before returning his gaze to Jensen, looking distressed rather than annoyed or bitchy, which is what Jensen had been expecting. "Look man, I'm just trying to save you from yourself okay? But you want the truth, so here it is. Even if I asked Jared to come there's more chance of a snowball

surviving in hell than him showing up, alright? When you split up, it was because he left you, and it wasn't on great terms."

"You're lying," Jensen accused, feeling his whole body start to shake. It couldn't be true. It was even worse than having lost Jared, the idea that Jensen had driven him away. That even with Jensen in hospital, Jared wouldn't come, because of whatever Jensen had done to make him leave. To end all that they'd shared and had together. It couldn't be true, that wasn't Jensen. It never was and it never would be.

"No, I was lying before to protect you," Chris said softly with a sad sigh as he wedged his hands back into his jeans pockets. "I was hoping we could work our way up to that particular truth."

"Jared left me?" Jensen said dumbly, as the truth of Chris' words began to register, from his tone and body language, as much as Jensen wanted to believe it was all lies, he couldn't. The heavy weight of heartache settled firmly on his chest and made his eyes damp in the corners, his breath hitching on each intake as the pain grew, fuelled by self doubt and the question *why*?

Chris nodded slowly, "Yeah. I'm sorry, Jen."

"I…I don't know what to do."

"Focus on trying to get your memory back," Doctor Gamble cut in before Chris could answer. "Your health needs to be your primary focus right now, Jensen, because stress won't help your memories return."

Jensen ignored her, didn't want to hear about taking care of himself, about getting better, not when Jared wasn't waiting for him. Not when: "My last memory…it's of Jared."

"Shit," Chris cursed, running a hand over his face. "But look, you got through this once, you can do it again. Your doc's right, you first, Jared later."

Jensen nodded and Chris pulled him into an awkward one armed hug, continuing to speak when it became obvious that Jensen didn't have anything left to say. "If you're going to be staying here for a while then I'll swing by your place, pick up some of your stuff, 'kay?"

"Thanks." Jensen nodded, not even able to make any requests when he didn't even know what he owned anymore. Just glad that he would maybe get a toothbrush and something else to wear other than an itchy gown with an annoying knot digging into his ass.

When Chris leaned down and kissed Jensen lightly on the top of the head, Jensen couldn't stop himself from tensing in surprise, or the question from rising. "Are we…?"

Chris laughed, eyes lighting up the most Jensen had seen since he walked in, and for a moment it seemed like the weight of the world had been lifted from his shoulders. "Oh

hell, no. I'm as straight as they come, dude."

Jensen chuckled a little, more out of total mortification than amusement. "Sorry, I didn't know."

Chris smiled and ruffled Jensen's hair lightly, and it felt safe and familiar. "Well now you do, so no hitting on me." Jensen smiled and Chris's grin softened to something lighter, more caring. "I'll leave you to get some rest, you call me if you think of anything you want and I'll be back to visit tonight."

"Before you go," Jensen had to ask. "What happened last night? You found me, right?"

"Yeah, I did," Chris paused, pulling the face that Jensen figured he'd be getting used to seeing a lot. The one where he clearly had the answer, but didn't want to tell Jensen for fear of his reaction. "You went on a bit of a…bender, last night. I don't know what you did while you were out but when I came 'round to check on you, I found you collapsed half on the couch, half on the floor, so I brought you in."

Jensen nodded slowly, forcing down the bile that was rising in the back of his throat, all amusement lost. "Thanks," Jensen muttered as Chris slipped out the room, followed by Doctor Gamble, whose words he blanked out.

He had done this to himself.

*

Two hours after Chris and Doctor Gamble left Jensen alone with his troubled thoughts again, she returned with two orderlies, interrupting Jensen's third confirmation count of the number of ceiling tiles in his room. He needed something, anything to focus his mind away from the accident, away from the loss of Jared that sat so heavily in his chest.

The reality of the last few hours, of all that Jensen had been told by Doctor Gamble and by Chris still felt so unreal. Like an incredibly vivid dream that he would soon wake up from, and Jensen was in no hurry to wake himself up from his own delusions that it wasn't real.

The longer he didn't have to face the real world, himself and the life he now led the better. Living in LA without Jared wasn't who Jensen was, it wasn't his life and it totally wasn't who he wanted to be. The more he could postpone becoming the new Jensen that was so foreign to him, embrace the numbness of shock and disbelief, the happier he could be. Even if it was just for a little while.

"How are you feeling Jensen?" Doctor Gamble asked cheerfully, picking up his chart and scribbling down notes of his vitals before hanging it back on the end of his bed.

"Like crap," Jensen answered honestly. Between the head injury and the hangover he was

feeling pretty shit, not even taking into account the emotional trauma he'd received over the last couple of hours.

She chuckled a little, "Well that's to be expected considering how high your blood alcohol level was when you were brought in. For now, we're transferring you up to the neurology ward where you'll be put into the care of Doctor Kripke's team. You should be able to get a little more settled once you're upstairs."

Jensen nodded, not looking forward to changing one small white walled room for another one, possibly filled with other people as well. He had a strong urge to go home, though he knew it was futile and stupid, his home didn't exist anymore. The apartment ten minutes off campus was occupied by new people, with new colors on the walls and different furniture, no longer his and Jared's safe haven. He couldn't even go to his parents house, curl up in his old bed, in his old room, even if it did exist he was in LA and his parents hundreds of miles and an airplane ride away.

The two orderlies helped Jensen into the wheelchair they brought in from outside his room after Doctor Gamble unhooked him from all the monitors he'd been connected to. Transferring his IV bag to a hook at the top of his wheelchair once he was settled, blanket from the bed covering his legs as a cool draft up his gown made him shiver.

"Ready?" she asked Jensen his chart now in her hands, dismissing the second orderly as the other took his place behind Jensen's chair.

"Sure, why not," Jensen answered and then he was being pushed out the ER room and through the hospital to the elevators at the back of the ER. Once they were inside they headed up to the fifth floor, Jensen's toes curled in on themselves as he was rolled past the large Neurology Ward sign to the nurses station.

Jensen tuned out Doctor Gamble as she spoke to the nurse behind the desk for what seemed liked a lifetime before he was wheeled along the corridor and into another private room. Either the current him had better insurance than he thought he did, or they thought he was enough of a nut job without him memory to keep him alone. He knew which one he was hoping it would be, but wasn't confident that was actually it.

"End of the ride," the orderly said, stopping the wheelchair in front of the bed in Jensen's new room and putting on the brakes so he could get into the new bed that was as good as identical to the old one.

"It's up to Doctor Kripke how long you stay on the ward, but for the moment this is where you'll be," Doctor Gamble said conversationally as she moved Jensen's IV and supervised the nurse that had followed them in reattaching Jensen to all the monitors.

With a final signature to Jensen's chart Doctor Gamble handed it over to the nurse and gave Jensen a warm smile. "Well, that's it from me, Jensen. I hope Doctor Kripke can help you get your memories back."

“Thanks,” Jensen said with as much feeling as he could muster, giving her a small wave before she slipped out the room, leaving him alone with the nurse.

She was tall, with long blonde hair pulled back into a ponytail, pale pink scrubs and shockingly perfect teeth under her wide smile. “So, Jensen, my name is Nurse Cassidy and I’m one of the team members that’ll be taking care of you while you’re Doctor Kripke’s patient.”

“Nice to meet you,” Jensen managed, a little afraid of her cheerful enthusiasm.

“Doctor Ferris will be your main attending while you’re with us and Doctor Kripke will be supervising your case. He’s booked in to come and see you after he’s finished afternoon rounds, so it’ll be any time between two and three, so if you want to grab a nap until then I can shut the blinds.”

“No, it’s okay thanks.” Jensen shook his head, knew there was no way that he was going to be able to sleep. Not with so much spinning around inside his head, the loss that sat heavily on his chest making each breath just a little of a struggle to take.

“Alrighty then,” she beamed. “Is there anything else you need while you’re waiting?”

“Some water would be good, if that’s okay?”

“Not a problem,” she said turning on her heel and hurrying out of the room. Jensen settled back on his pillows and shut his eyes; all he could do now was wait.

*

When Nurse Cassidy had returned to Jensen’s room she had a plastic jug of water, some disposable cups and a small stack of magazines in her arms. Setting it all down on his table she’d grinned and informed him that if he wasn’t going to sleep then he might want something to do.

She’d brought him a selection, a few Times, a National Geographic, two movie magazines and a Rolling Stone. He accepted them with a smile, even though he had no intention of reading any of them, reminding himself exactly out of synch he was with the rest of the world.

After she’d given him the remote to the TV mounted in the corner of the room, she hurried out, telling him she had other patients to tend to, finally leaving him alone. Settling in, determined not to think about the past he remembered and the past he didn’t, Jensen started counting the tiles on the ceiling of his new room, waiting until his new doctor arrived to hopefully make him remember.

When Doctor Kripke finally arrived he startled Jensen out of his new game of connect the

dots with his eyes on the room's linoleum floor and he wasn't anything close to what Jensen had expected. He had imagined Doctor Kripke, only briefly, as someone older, more distinguished…more professional looking.

He had not imagined a man who looked like he wasn't even out of his thirties yet, with a geeky smile and a shaved head to cover a receding hairline exposed by stubbly re-growth. Jensen totally had not imagined the so called specialist to be wearing ratty jeans, a faded red sweater and dirty looking Converse under his white lab coat, which had ink stains at the bottom of both top pockets.

"Jensen Ackles?" He asked with a lopsided grin that Jensen really hoped wasn't supposed to be reassuring, because it totally wasn't.

"Yes," Jensen answered tentatively, hoping that he was wrong in his assessment that this was the 'specialist' Doctor Kripke that was supposed to help him.

"I'm Doctor Kripke," he grinned again and Jensen forced himself to suppress a groan as the doctor held out his hand for shaking.

"Nice to meet you," Jensen greeted through gritted teeth as he shook Doctor Kripke's hand.

"Sorry I've not been able to see you sooner, but I had outpatient appointments all morning. I hope that Doctor Gamble and my staff have taken good care of you in my absence."

"Yes, they have thank you," Jensen thought back to Nurse Cassidy, and as good as her intentions were, he wished she'd paid just a little less attention to him.

"Good, now let's get down to business. I reviewed the initial report written on your condition and your test results and I feel confident in confirming the diagnosis of retrograde amnesia."

Jensen nodded, since Chris had walked in knowing him and the life he couldn't remember, all remaining hope Jensen had been clinging to that the amnesia wasn't real had been lost. Somehow it still didn't make it any easier to hear.

"I understand that this isn't good news, but diagnosing the problem is an important part of determining the appropriate treatment for you."

Jensen nodded again, not trusting his voice or himself to speak, not to sulk and shout and demand to know why him? What did he do that was so wrong that meant he had to be punished like this?

"What concerns me and intrigues me in equal parts is the apparent nature of your memory loss, and the localization to the last ten years."

“Ten years doesn’t exactly seem local to me,” Jensen snapped, couldn’t help it. Not when this doctor, this man who was supposed to be helping him was standing there looking like a kid at Christmas. Acting like Jensen wasn’t a person whose life had been ruined, but instead was an interesting new puzzle to pull apart and study.

“I’m sorry, perhaps that was badly put on my part,” Doctor Kripke said, looking like he was at least trying to contain his fascination and excitement. “What you need to understand, Mr. Ackles, is that in there are two major groups of retrograde amnesia. The first is the most common, where as the result of trauma to the head a victim does not remember the accident that caused the trauma, and often the events leading up to it. The second is where all memory of personal information is lost, the cases where patients wake up no longer knowing who they are, where they live, all details about their lives, not just a specific time period.”

“What does that mean?” Jensen asked, tired already of the long explanations. He just wanted to know what was going to happen to him, if he could get his memory back. If he would ever remember.

"It means that we're going to have to run some more comprehensive tests on you, to see if we can find an underlying cause for your amnesia,” Doctor Kripke explained softly. “As it's a specific period of memories that you have lost, as opposed to the more global retrograde amnesia I mentioned, there is the possibility that there is a specific reason for it that wasn’t picked up on the tests you were given when you were first admitted."

Jensen swallowed, "Why don't I like the sound of that?"

"There are two main causes of amnesia, physiological damage or psychological trauma. Taking into consideration both the fact that the amnesia began after the head trauma you received yesterday evening and a the nature of your memory loss, I feel confident in saying that your retrograde amnesia is the result of head trauma received while under the influence of alcohol."

"Is that what made me forget, being drunk?"

"Honestly, I can't say, Mr. Ackles. There is a possibility that it was a contributing factor to the memory loss, but there really is no way for me to say definitively either yes or no to whether it was or not. What I am concerned about is that the memory loss you’re displaying may be the result more serious damage to your brain that we initially thought."

"Is my memory going to come back?" Jensen asked, didn’t want to think about the possibility of him being brain damaged, just wanted the doctor to tell him he could be fixed. That one day he would be able to remember what happened to him over the last ten years, why he moved to LA, what happened to him and Jared, who his friends are now and what happened to the people he used to know and care about.

"It is likely that your memory will return to some degree, though there is no way to say for sure how much will return or when."

“Is there anything you can do? To make my memory come back?”

“There is no conventional treatment for amnesia. If the tests reveal that there is physiological damage to your temporal lobe then it may be possible to repair the damage or at least try and halt any progression. If there isn't any obvious trauma, then there is no drug therapy or surgery to prevent or undo the effects of amnesia.”

“So there’s nothing…I just have to wait and see? That’s it?”

“Some patients have success with less conventional treatments such as hypnotherapy, but it isn't the answer for some. You may find talking events through with a friend or family member who shared them, or returning to familiar places may help you gain access to some memories that have been lost, but it isn't guaranteed to work. You may wake up with your memory back tomorrow, but in the same way, it may never return to you, or may return in patches years from now.”

“That can’t be it. You can’t just tell me that my memory is gone and there’s nothing you can do! Why are you even keeping me here if there’s nothing you can do?”

“I'm sorry Mr Ackles, I know that this isn't what you want to hear, but I find it best not to raise your hopes or your expectations at this early stage. We need to keep you under our care for several days at least, so we can conduct more thorough testing and monitor your progress.”

“I don’t want to be monitored, watched like a damn lab rat. I just want to go home.”

“Mr Ackles, I understand you’re frustrated, but we are here to help you. Not only to try and regain your memory, but to adjust to life with amnesia. You have to be prepared for a lot of difficulty and frustration, especially in the first few weeks. Most cases of retrograde amnesia retain the ability to function as they did before, you most likely will know what drawer you keep your cutlery in, but not be able to remember when or where you purchased it. This divide between what you remember and what you don't often causes the greatest frustration. We have counselors and therapists on staff to help you with the difficulties of settling into your new life.”

“Is there anything else?”

“For now, no. I know it’s difficult, but the most important thing for you right now Mr Ackles, is not to give up hope. For now, I’m going to set up some more scans and tests for you, in addition I will be making you regular appointments with me to check your progress as well as passing your case over to a psychotherapist in this department who is trained in dealing with cases of retrograde amnesia."

Jensen didn’t say anything, just watched Doctor Kripke write some more notes on his chart before leaving the room. That was it. There was nothing they could do for him, all he could do was wait and hope that his memory might come back. That one day he might be able to remember again.

*

Chris arrived on the ward to visit Jensen about an hour after they'd served Jensen dinner. It had been an unappetizing dollop of chili and rice that Jensen had pushed around his plate for twenty minutes before cheerful Nurse Cassidy had taken the hint and removed it, leaving him with a cup of juice and a pot of neon green jell-o for later 'just in case you change your mind'.

He slipped inside after knocking on the door, in different clothes from that morning, with wet hair and a black duffle bag slung over his shoulder. "How ya holding up?"

"I don't know…," Jensen shrugged, the numbness had settled into a level of comfortable detachment after talking to Doctor Kripke. All the time it felt like someone else's life, like what was happening to him was some really surreal dream, Jensen was okay. Able to switch off his brain, sit and enjoy nothingness, so much better than facing the reality of his situation. "Okay, I guess."

"Dude, I'm not even going to pretend I can imagine what you're going through right now," Chris said as he pulled the guest chair out of the corner of the room and around so it was next to Jensen's bed, turned to face him. "But it's got to get better, right?"

Jensen shrugged again, Chris' intrusion into the silence he'd been enjoying was an unwelcome disruption of the pleasant level of apathy he'd managed to reach in the last couple of hours. Chris was forcing reality back into Jensen's perception and as Jensen didn't want it, he wasn't going to be glad about it. Or sociable.

"Thought you might be tired of your butt hanging out for everyone to see, so I got you some clothes." Chris grinned as he dumped the duffle bag on the end of Jensen's bed. Unzipping it he rifled through, pulling out a few items and throwing them at Jensen.

Jensen caught them and studied them in his lap, a clean pair of plain dark blue underwear, a well worn Led Zeppelin tee and a pair of cotton pajama pants that looked like they were about to give in and just fall apart. Jensen stared at the pants for a long moment, not sure if he should trust what his eyes and brain were telling him. They looked like the ones Jensen had owned at college, but he couldn't believe that he would have kept them that long, let alone that they had survived then ten year gap if he had. "They were all I could find that weren't jogging pants that smelled like they'd not seen water since they were made. I'll bring you them by tomorrow, when they're out the dryer."

"Thanks, you didn't have to," Jensen said offering Chris a small smile. He figured it was the least he could do if Chris was doing laundry for him, when even Jared had used to

refused to touch anything of Jensen's that hadn't been washed in a week.

"Who else is going to watch out for if not your best friend, you moron?" Chris laughed as he slumped down into the chair, dragging the duffle bag down onto his lap. "But don't think you don't owe me big time, I don't just do anyone's laundry, ya hear me?"

Jensen let his smile widen just a little, as much as he was trying to resist being drawn out of himself and into conversation, maybe he was starting to see why he and Chris were friends.

Chris seemed undisturbed by Jensen's silence and waning sullenness, and kept smiling and talking. "It's a good thing I'm used to you being a moody bastard, or this'd be getting pretty awkward by now."

"I'm moody?" Jensen couldn't help but ask, feeling his face crumple up into a frown. Sure, Jensen could be a little grouchy in the mornings, or when he was sick, but then who wasn't.

"You know what they say, if it was an Olympic sport…," Chris trailed off as he started to root around inside the duffle bag again and Jensen sunk further down into his bed, crossing his arms over his chest.

Jensen wasn't moody, Jared had never let him stay grumpy or angry or grouchy or even snappish for long. All smiles and laughter and warm touches Jared brought out the best in people and made it stay, even when he wasn't in the room he still made a difference. He made sure Jensen wasn't that guy, that he never would be. Jensen couldn't believe that he'd ever ended up like that, even without Jared in his life anymore.

"So, I didn't know what you wanted," Chris continued, seemingly ignoring Jensen's rising irritation. "But then I thought as you don't know what you have and what you don't, you'll have what I bring you," he said with a grin that Jensen presumed was supposed lighten the mood.

It didn't work and Jensen couldn't help but snort then snap out snidely, "You're so sensitive."

Chris threw a book at Jensen's head that he'd just pulled from the duffle, which missed Jensen’s head as he ducked out of its path, watching as it thumped against the wall behind his bed before dropping to the floor. "Yeah, well, you're being an ass, so that makes us even. At least I'm trying."

"Well I didn't ask you to!" Jensen exploded, the rage he didn't even know was building inside him bursting out like blast of anger and resentment. He didn't need Chris disrupting his bubble of self created safety, breaking through his denial and blank acceptance to remind him that there was a life out there that he didn't know. Didn't want the banter that came naturally to Chris that he didn't understand, the possessions he didn't

remember buying or owning. Didn't want any reminder that there were two different versions of himself, the one he was and the one he should be.

What he wanted was to be left the hell alone.

Jensen watched Chris, waiting for him to get up and leave, and huffed in annoyance when he didn't. Instead, Chris leaned back in the guest chair, kicked off his shoes and put his feet up on the edge of Jensen's bed. Jensen didn't have to know him to understand it meant that he was digging in and had no intention of leaving.

Crossing his arms over his chest, Chris took a deep breath before answering. "You might not remember, or give two craps about me right now, but the old you? I like to think the old you would've done the same thing for me, and it'd take a little more than me being pissy to get you to back off. That means that now, you're pretty much stuck with me. So start enjoying having someone who gives a crap."

All Jensen could do for a long minute was stare at Chris, mouth hanging open in shock, jumping between amusement and annoyance at the matter of fact way Chris had about him. Jensen looked at Chris for a long moment as he tried to compose himself and realized that this was it, he could accept Chris, ignore him or try and push him away, but no matter what, Chris wasn't going to leave Jensen alone. No matter how much he wanted it.

Jensen didn't have the energy to fight Chris, not when he didn't know what buttons to push or how to make him go away and stay away. Jensen didn't want to accept him, so that only left him with one option. Jensen hoped that if he ignored Chris for long enough, eventually he'd get bored and give up on Jensen, or at least give him some space to be as moody and disassociated from reality as he wanted. So he said: "You remind me of my brother."

Then it was Chris' turn to stare and splutter for a moment, looking like a confused fish as he tried to process what had just been said and Jensen sat back and enjoyed it while it lasted.

"Forget one head injury, I'll give you another if you compare me to Josh again," Chris threatened pointing a finger at Jensen, which would have been more concerning if he wasn't grinning when he said it.

"Why?" Jensen couldn't stop his mouth from asking, as determined as he was to try and not engage Chris in any real conversation, the tidbit of information on his brother’s life was too much to let pass.

Chris snorted, rolling his eyes heavenward before aiming a pointed glare at Jensen and asking: "Do I look like a white picket fence, 2.4 kids and a couple of dogs kinda guy?"

"Josh is married?" Jensen spluttered in shock. He couldn't imagine Josh settling down,

the big brother who always hooked Jensen and Jared up with their booze and drugs, listened to metal obnoxiously loud and never saw a girl more than once if she didn't put out, and never more than three times if she did.

"Crap. Sorry man, I just…forget what it is you know and what you don't," Chris said looking guilty and Jensen couldn't help but have pangs of his own. Jensen wasn't an ass, and as much as he wanted Chris to go away and leave him the hell alone, he didn't want to make him feel like crap.

Chris continued, "Yeah, they got married in 2000, Alice, his missus popped out their first sprog about six months later. Let me tell you, your momma was none too pleased when she did that bit of math, but I think she forgave them by grandbaby number four."

"No, I just…Josh?" Jensen stammered, still unable to get past the image of his brother as a responsible, settled adult, not the cooler older kid who sat on the roof with him and Jared on Halloween with BB guns. "Married? With four kids?"

"Last I heard, number five's on the way," Chris said grinning and waggling his eyebrows. "They're like a baby making factory, crazy, I tell you, that's what they are."

"I can't imagine it, Josh settled down with a house and a wife and kids." If Josh was happy then Jensen was too, because that's all he'd wanted for all of his family. It didn't make it any easier to turn the memory of his brother, everything he thought he knew about him on its head, into a family man. Just thinking of Josh as a man was hard enough, thirty-four instead of twenty-four.

"Like I said before, people change a lot in ten years," Chris said and Jensen could tell he was trying really hard not to be patronizing, even though he couldn't say how he knew. He just did. "He even cut his hair."

Jensen blinked. "Now that, I refuse to believe," he laughed. From before he could remember Josh had long hair, even as a child he'd refused to have it cut. He'd bartered good behavior, finished homework and no complaining about Church or chores in exchange for keeping it chin length. Once he'd hit high school it had stopped being trimmed to his jaw line and started creeping further down his back, until it was longer than Mackie's as she tried to grow hers down to her butt when Jensen left for college.

"Dude, seriously," Chris said through his rising laughter, eyes crinkling in the corners with amusement. "Alice told him she wasn't having him in the wedding photos with long hair, so he could either cut it or she'd get another groom. Apparently he cut it the next day."

"How do you know so much about my family?" Jensen asked through a smile, even though a part of him should have felt threatened or at least concerned by Chris knowing so much about his family, he wasn't. For that moment it was just enough to be able to hear about his brother and his wedding, know that at least they were safe and happy in the

new world Jensen had been thrown head first into.

"Three years ago you dragged me to the Ackles family Christmas and naturally your momma saw me for the charming gentleman I am, and writes me every holiday season."

"My momma writes my best friend?"

"Damn straight."

"I'm sorry."

"For what?"

"Being an ass earlier."

"Well, that makes a pleasant surprise."

"What does?"

"You apologizing for being an ass, you've not done that in years. But then neither have I, so I guess I'm not exactly one to pick fault."

"Isn't the whole point of being best buddies not having to say sorry for being an ass?"

"You could be right about that one, son."

"But really, I just...Ten years of my life are missing and I don't even know how to begin to deal with it. I just want to shut my eyes and pretend like it never happened and it's really hard to do that when I look at you and I know your face, and I know we're close, but I can't remember anything about you."

"You want me to go?"

"…No, I don't."

"Good. So, you gonna tell me what the specialist, doctor what's-his-name, said?"

"Not much, so what did you bring me other than something to preserve the dying dignity of my butt crack?"

"You don't want to talk about, I get that, but you're going to have to tell me at some point, y'know that right?"

“I know,” Jensen acknowledged. He just wasn’t ready to talk about it now; admitting that he might never get his memory back.

“So, I picked up a couple of your books, I couldn’t find any magazines that weren’t porno’s. I found a book of soduku, not sure if it’s yours or not, but I figure it’s something to do. It’s not much, but you’re place pretty much looks like a bomb hit it. I’m gonna go back tomorrow and have a proper look, see what I can find you.”

“Okay,” Jensen nodded, “thank you.”

"You might want to hold out on the thanks,” Chris said, putting the bag beside Jensen’s bed.

“Why?”

“I should probably warn you,” Chris said with an obviously guilty air about him. “I called Danni earlier to tell her what happened to you."

"Danny?" Jensen frowned, felt a spark of recognition that was swamped by a familiar wave of frustration, a black hole where he knew memories should be.

"Shit,” Chris cursed with feeling, standing up and pacing for a few minutes before turning to look at Jensen and asking the obvious, “You don't remember, do you?"

Jensen shook his head, already getting tired of other people knowing more about his life than he did. “Who's Danny?"

Chris shifted from one foot to the other, looked like he was trying to figure out the best way to break whatever news it was that Jensen was supposed to know. "Danni's your girlfriend," he blurted out, apparently unable to find a decent way to sugar coat it.

“Girlfriend?” Jensen choked out and really wished Chris had found a way to make the blow a little lighter. Because seriously, him, with a girlfriend? What the fuck was that about?

Chris nodded, “Her name’s Danneel.”

“But I don’t…I don’t like girls,” Jensen sputtered out pretty much what had been going through his head since Chris said the word girlfriend.

Chris looked uncomfortable, “Which is what I said to you when you told me you’d hooked up with her.”

“What did I say?” Now morbidly curious about himself, about the Jensen Ackles he had been when he lost his memory.

“I don’t think you were over Jared, you weren’t ready for another relationship with a guy and…I don’t know, she kinda stuck.”

“That’s not what I said,” Jensen pressed. “That’s what you thought.” Chris was dancing around telling him the truth again, his attempt at protecting Jensen from himself. As much as he wanted to ignore reality, pretend that this had never happened, he needed to know who he was. The man he’d become, especially when Chris was so reluctant to discuss him, when all the information Jensen had been given sat heavily in the bottom of his stomach.

Chris sighed, “You told me to go screw myself and it was up to you who you fucked and who you didn’t.” Chris shrugged, “So I let it drop.”

“I said that?” Jensen swallowed, tried to imagine himself saying something like that but nothing came, though the sense of familiarity was unsettling.

Chris nodded slowly before saying, “I don’t think now’s the time for this.”

“For what?”

“For working out everything that’s changed for you in the last ten years…I’m gonna head out, okay? The nurse’s station has my number, get them to call me if you need anything, alright?”

Jensen nodded and watched Chris go, he didn’t have to know him, only not be an idiot to realize he was trying to protect Jensen. But he didn’t need to be protected, he needed his memory back and he needed Jared.

Most of all he needed to understand why he had neither.

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Three days and still no memories later Jensen was tucked into the arm chair that Nurse Cassidy had brought into his room earlier that morning, so he didn’t have to spend all day sat in bed if he didn’t want to. The collection of magazines and newspapers beside his bed was growing, from the hospital staff and Chris, but Jensen was absolute in his refusal to read them. Just the thought of trying to catch up on ten years of his life, on all the changes in the whole world that he had missed was so overwhelming Jensen couldn’t even look at the pile, let alone start reading.

Instead, he sat reading Lord of the Rings, a tattered paperback copy of The Two Towers that Chris had found somewhere under Jensen’s bed for him. Jensen remembered being ten years old, wrapped up in a sleeping bag on Jared’s bed with Gerry Padalecki reading *Concerning Hobbits* to them both. Jensen sent over to Jared’s to play and spend the night, his dad already steaming drunk by mid afternoon and picking fights with his momma. Mackie was asleep in Megan’s room next door and Josh hadn’t been home since school let out on Friday afternoon. Every night Jensen spent in the Padalecki house, Gerry would read them both another chapter before bed, Jared refusing to hear anymore of the story without Jensen.

Just before Jared's sixteenth birthday his parents had sent him to a math camp for the summer and Jensen had teased him about it the entire month before he left. Mostly because he knew he was going to miss Jared. He'd taken one of the Padalecki's copies of Rings, read it through twice while Jared was gone.

Even now, it made him feel safe. The memory of him and Jared tucked safely under Superman linen, the sound of Gerry's voice, deep and smooth, was real and his.

A knock on the door of his room startled Jensen out of Boromir's death, though he didn't glance up from the page as he said, "Come in." It was likely to be a nurse or orderly, given Chris wasn't due back until the next day and no one else had been to visit.

"Hi," a soft, shy voice broke into Jensen's thoughts, one that he didn't recognize.

Looking up from the book Jensen blinked in surprise, it wasn't a nurse that was for sure. The voice belonged to a woman, probably in her twenties, and she was beautiful, even Jensen could see that. Dressed casually in jeans and a tee she still looked like she just stepped out a magazine, with her long red hair and curvy figure.

"Er…Hi?" Jensen managed, unsure why his throat was closing up and his palms were starting to sweat. Like his body knew something that his brain didn't, a feeling he was starting to get used to, but really hated.

"You don't know who I am, do you?" She asked, biting her bottom lip and shifting, clearly nervous.

Jensen shook his head, had a suspicion that sat heavy in the bottom of his stomach of who she was. Couldn't even think it, because of how absurd it seemed…that *she* could be his girlfriend.

Jensen shook his head, but still said: "You're my girlfriend?"

"Sort of, yeah," She said, nodding in reply, smiled a little but even though he just met her, he could see the sadness in her eyes. It was honest and obvious, like Jared, and it hurt just as much. "I'm Danneel…You call…You used to call me Danni."

Jensen dropped the book to the floor, pointed to the chair that sat at the end of his hospital bed where Chris had left it after his visit. "You can sit, if you want."

"I probably shouldn't stay long," Danneel said, wedging her hands in her jeans pockets, but sitting down anyway, on the edge of the chair, like she was staying prepared to run away.

Jensen nodded, didn't know what he was supposed to say to her. This was his girlfriend and he didn't even remember her face, know who she was, let alone have any memories

of wanting anyone but Jared. Least of all women.

“Chris told me what happened,” she said in a rush, breaking the ever growing tension of their silence. It was clear to Jensen, even not knowing her, that she was as lost as to what to say, how to act as he was. “I wasn’t sure if I should come, but…I had to see you, after everything. I needed to see that you were okay. I would have been here sooner but I was out of town with work.”

“What did you mean, sort of?” Jensen asked, the response she had given just a minute ago flashing sharp in his mind, resurfacing from his instant dismissal of her words.

“What?” She asked, head tilting to the side just a little as she looked at him, hair falling in her eyes.

“When I asked if you were my girlfriend, you said *sort of*. What did you mean?”

“Oh,” she said softly, looking at the floor. “We broke up. The other night…the night you had your accident.”

“Oh…Okay,” Jensen said, stunned and unsure how to respond. How to react to the news that the night he lost his mind, the girlfriend he didn’t remember broke up with him. Should he be sad, or relieved, or angry? He didn’t know and the frustration burned heavy inside his chest, though she must have read it as anger towards her, as she rushed to speak.

“I know you don’t remember anything, about me or us so you can’t know how hard this is for me, but I’m really sorry, Jensen. I never wanted to hurt you,” She said, leaning forward like she wanted to reach out to him, but was too afraid.

“What do you mean, hurt me?”

“If I’d known you were going to… That this was going to happen then maybe I wouldn’t have been so…” She trailed off, returning her gaze to the floor, voice soft and choked.

“We were fighting?” Jensen asked, even though he knew it was true. Could hear in the tone of her voice and see it in the way she held herself, as if she was afraid to tell him.

“Yeah, we were fighting,” she answered with a small nod that gave Jensen a glimpse of the tears in her eyes.

Jensen’s chest felt tight, angry and guilty that he didn’t even know this woman and he was causing her pain, making her cry. And he knew, deep down, though he didn’t know how, the answer to his question, but he still had to ask: “Was it my fault?”

“That doesn’t matter anymore. You don’t even remember me, us,” She said, breathing in deep and standing up, holding herself like nothing had happened. “I just wanted to tell

you that if you need anything, I'm here for you, okay? I want to help."

Jensen stood up, crossed the space between them as he spoke, totally blindsided by her. "We broke up and you want to help me?" He asked, couldn't get his head around the fact that just being near him made her sad and still she wanted to help. Couldn't help but wonder: "Did you not want it to end?"

"Of course I didn't, Jensen, I loved you. I still do," She answered with a warm smile, hand soft and warm against Jensen's neck for just a second. "But right now, this is about you needing all the help you can get and I should be a part of that, I want to be. Me leaving you doesn't change that…and I couldn't. I couldn't leave you like this."

"You look so sad," Jensen commented softly. It was all over her face and in her eyes, and it was so obvious that he was the cause, even if he didn't want to believe he could do this to anyone. To someone who loved him, and someone he must have loved in return.

"I guess I am, after all, I've lost you twice in twenty four hours," she said, her eyes wet again, but quickly blinked away. But she couldn't blink away the fact that she felt guilty, it was written across her face plain as day.

"Don't blame yourself," he assured softly. He didn't want her to feel guilty as well.

"What?" She asked, taking a step back away from Jensen, wiping at her eyes with the back of her hand.

"I can see it in your eyes, you blame yourself… Jared does… Jared used to do the same. This isn't your fault."

She smiled softly and the dampness in her eyes turned into full tears, clinging onto her eyelashes for a brief moment before they rolled down her face. Sniffing she stepped forward to close the distance between them, leaned up and brushed her lips against Jensen's forehead, the smell of her perfume so familiar but foreign at the same time. It felt like Jensen should know it, should know the meaning attached to the smell his body knew but his mind couldn't grasp. Just like everything else about her.

"Thank you," she whispered into his skin before she pulled away, straightened her clothes as she spoke. "I'll stop by tomorrow, bring some of your things. If you need anything, you and Chris have my number."

Jensen watched her go, the door to his room shutting with a soft snick behind her, leaving him with a feeling of guilt and emptiness in his stomach. He didn't know why, pushed his mind, demanding to remember her and what they had, how they ended. Nothing came, only the feeling that he was the cause of the sadness that clung to her, and he didn't want to be.

Big Bang 2009 || Part Three

When Jensen was wheeled back into his room after his afternoon of testing and introduction to his therapist, he found Chris sitting in his chair waiting for him, guitar on his lap, plucking at the strings.

“Hey man, sorry I’ve not been by in a couple of days,” he said by way of greeting as Jensen was transferred from his wheelchair back to his bed.

“I can walk, you know,” he grumbled as the orderly pulled his sheets up.

“And you know, these are the rules. Deal with it,” he said with a cheerful grin, used to having the argument and probably not just with Jensen.

“Hey,” Jensen eventually said to Chris when the orderly had left, whistling to himself as he shut the door behind him.

“Any news on when you’re getting released?” Chris asked, aside from the last two days he’d been by to see Jensen at least twice every day since he was admitted, keeping up to date with his condition.

“Doctor Kripke said he’s thinking about Monday, but he’s still doing tests.”

Chris frowned, “Really? There something you’re not telling me?”

Jensen shook his head, had settled into a more comfortable routine with Chris, mainly because it actually made the time pass quicker than trying to fight his attempts to keep Jensen from falling into a pit of his own self pity. Jensen had been trying to work more information out of Chris about himself, despite the nagging somewhere deep inside that warned him he wasn’t sure he wanted to know.

Chris had remained tight-lipped, was getting better at not letting things about Jensen slip in conversation, at least, not the things he wanted to know. He’d told Jensen he hadn’t graduated from college, but wouldn’t say why. Would list off names of people Jensen supposedly knew now, but wouldn’t tell him how they met or why they’d not visited. The one that bugged Jensen the most was that Chris wouldn’t tell him why he moved to LA, only that he was still with Jared when they did.

As for Jared, Chris said nothing. Ignored all questions once he’d told Jensen they weren’t going to talk about it. Was convinced that Jensen wasn’t ready for what he had to say.

Jensen needed answers, he just wished his subconscious would get with the program already and start giving him his memories back. Or at least, find him someone to talk to who would be honest about who he was.

“Danneel stopped by yesterday,” Jensen announced, as Chris started to pluck a tune out on the guitar. Jensen’s fingers knew the chords and he could have hummed along if he wanted, but he didn’t know what it was. Swallowed down the frustration threatening to rise, reminded himself he had to get used to this, had been warned by both Kripke and his therapist Dr Singer to expect it.

“Really?” Chris asked and Jensen wasn’t expecting him to be so surprised, considering he was the one who said she would be stopping by. “I figured she wasn’t going to come.”

“She said she’s been out of town,” Jensen explained. “Why are you so surprised she came?”

Chris shrugged, “I guess I thought seeing as you guys broke up, she’d decide not to come.” Jensen knew it was lie, couldn’t have said why but his gut knew and he trusted it. “What did she say anyway?”

Jensen mirrored Chris’ shrug, “You know, the usual. Came to see how I was, she told me about the break up.” He didn’t say how she felt guilty for his amnesia; it wasn’t something he was going to share without her permission. He felt like he’d wronged her enough with adding to it, even if he didn’t know how.

“Oh,” Chris said, but left it at that, though Jensen could tell he wanted to ask more. Was obviously trying to find a way to get more information out of Jensen without actually giving any up.

Yeah, Jensen was beginning to lose his patience with this. It was one thing to have lost his memory, another to have a friend keeping things from him.

“She told me to call her,” Jensen said when it was clear that Chris wasn’t going to add anything to his exclamation. “But I can’t find her number in this thing,” Jensen said holding up his phone to Chris. Another thing that had freaked him out, even though the idea of a mobile phone had been crazy when Nurse Cassidy had explained it, he had known how to use it. In Jensen’s opinion it was really fucking unfair. He’d rather has his memories and not know how to use a phone or the Mac laptop Chris had brought him from home.

“She’s not?” Chris asked before adding, “Might be a good thing.”

Jensen frowned, “Why not?”

“I just don’t think it’s a good idea, you calling Danni up,” Chris said, something in his voice that Jensen thought might be him being protective. Though Jensen wasn’t sure which one of them he was looking out for.

“Why? She told me too,” Jensen said, determined. If Chris wasn’t going to share why he shouldn’t be doing what Danneel told him to, then he damn well wasn’t going to listen.

“And no, Danneel isn’t in here.”

“You sure?” Chris frowned, continuing not to answer Jensen’s enquiry.

“Yes, I’m sure,” Jensen said, annoyed, and threw his phone across the room to Chris. “Look for yourself and while you’re at it, tell me why I shouldn’t call her.”

“Because she’s too nice for her own good,” Chris eventually said with a sigh, Jensen’s phone open and his gaze fixed intently on the screen. “You think it’s going to be easy for her, coming to see you and you not remembering anything about who she is? The three years she put up with your sorry ass.”

“Why did she break up with me?” Jensen asked, though he didn’t really expect Chris to tell him.

“You don’t want to know, Jen,” is what he said and though Jensen wasn’t surprised it was enough to make him snap.

“Yeah, I really do. And I think it’s about time you stopped deciding what I do and don’t want to know and start treating me like a fucking adult.”

“Sheesh, sorry, man, I’m just trying to look out for you, but if you want the truth, here it is,” Chris said, putting the guitar back in its case. “You didn’t treat her so great…and that’s pretty much the biggest understatement I ever made.”

“What?” Jensen asked, his voice scratchy as that feeling in the bottom on his stomach told him it was true and he didn’t want to believe it.

“I know this must be…weird to hear about yourself, when you don’t remember, and that’s why I’ve been…cagey. She dumped you because you were a dick who treated her like crap for three years.”

“I don’t believe it,” Jensen said, tried to fight the sense of familiarity, of truth to the words. “I don’t. I would never…”

“Jensen, you do have her in your phone. Maybe this will help.”

Jensen looked down at his phone as Chris handed it back to him, the screen lit up with Danneel’s profile. The picture of her smiled up at him from the screen, one strap of her bikini top hanging off her shoulder and the sand behind her golden brown. It looked almost loving, the picture he had once assigned to his girlfriend, but the name he’d put her under felt like a punch to the gut. Maybe Chris had been right.

If Jensen had treated her right, he wouldn’t have her in his phone as *GREAT TITS*.

*

Jensen banged on Jared's front door, excitement buzzing through him as he rapped his knuckles against the smooth wood until Sherri Padalecki pulled the door open, eyes smiling and a laugh on her lips.

"I take it you got your letter?" She asked, eyeing the A4 envelope Jensen clutched in his other hand, University of Texas stamped in the top left corner.

Jensen nodded, bouncing on the balls of his feet in excitement, "Is Jared home yet? Please tell me he's home!"

Sherri laughed again and stepped back, Jensen darted inside before she could even say he was home, kicking off his shoes and heading for the stairs. "Thank you Mama Sherri!" He called over his shoulder as he ran up them, barging into Jared's room, not bothering to knock.

Jared was sprawled over his bed, arms and feet hanging off the edges as he snored loudly, still dressed in his track team sweats. Jensen kicked the door shut behind him, it slammed with a heavy crack and Jared sat bolt upright, grunting in confusion.

Jensen flung himself at Jared, arms wrapped around his neck they tumbled back onto Jared's bed, it creaking underneath them. "Jens'n," Jared said, words muffled by Jensen's chest, which Jared was being squashed under.

Jensen laughed and rolled over onto his back, pulling Jared with him who was shoving at Jensen's chest and complaining, "Dude, I was sleeping."

Jensen grinned even wider as Jared pouted and told him, "Don't care. Didn't want to wait for you to wake up."

Jared shifted until he was laid on his side, propped up on one elbow to look at Jensen as he draped his other arm across Jensen's stomach, fingers dipping under his tee to stroke his belly. "Going to tell me what was so important I couldn't finish my post first 10,000m race nap?"

Jensen held the envelope up in Jared's line of sight and gave him what had to be the biggest sit eating grin ever. "Just this."

"It came?" Jared said as his eyes went comically wide, sitting up again and snatching the letter from Jensen's hands and turning it over.

Jensen hadn't wanted to open the letter from UT's admissions board without Jared, but his momma had been when he got home from watching Jared's race. Jared's had arrived four days earlier and Jensen was too desperate to know if he had been accepted as well to fight her when she insisted that he open it with her.

“Can I?” Jared asked, as he started to pull the letter out the envelope, a grin creeping over his features to match the glint in his eye.

Jensen nodded, grinned a little harder as he agreed, “Sure.” Jared had to know Jensen had gotten in, signed up for biology and anatomy classes for the first year, setting him up for a career in sports medicine. He wouldn’t be this happy if they hadn’t accepted him, forced to separate from Jared.

Jared pulled the acceptance letter out, pushed damp hair out of his eyes and scanned the letter, eyes darting back and forth across the page, smile widening with each line. “Jen,” he breathed and it made Jensen’s stomach clench, the love and affection in his voice. “You did it. You got a full ride.”

Jensen felt a blush rise up his cheeks, hadn’t given much thought to the scholarship UT had awarded him, had been more focused on Jared, on going to college with Jared.

“I’m so proud of you,” Jared said, dropping the papers to the floor and pulling Jensen close.

“We’re going to college together, no long distance relationship,” Jensen said, felt giddy at just the thought of it.

“What do you say we celebrate the good news,” Jared smirked, rolling on top of Jensen and waggling his eyebrows.

“Oh, what do you have in mind?” Jensen laughed, leaning up into Jared. He didn’t need to ask, he just liked it when Jared talked dirty.

Jensen woke up with a start, the bright daylight creeping in through the crack in the drapes stinging his eyes. His breath hitched as his dream came rushing back, fresh like it happened yesterday, not two years ago…no, not two years, *twelve*.

Jensen thought he was going to vomit, leant over the side of the bed just in case as he heaved in deep and even breaths, trying to force his stomach to settle. How was he supposed to get used to things being so screwed up?

That was how Nurse Cassidy found him ten minutes later, trying to keep his breathing under control and the corners of his eyes damp. It wasn’t fair. It wasn’t fair that he couldn’t remember any of what was missing, that what he could remember was Jared, the thing he wanted most but couldn’t have.

“Jensen, are you okay?” Nurse Cassidy asked, crossing the room to his bed rubbing her hand softly over his back.

“Yeah,” he answered eventually, finding his voice and willing down the stir of desire the

memory has caused, remembering what had happened after. The door locked and Jensen's fist in his mouth stop him from making noise. "I just, had this dream where I remembered something."

"You remembered?" She bounced, grin getting even wider than Jensen thought possible. He felt bad shaking his head and turning it into a pout.

"Sorry, I remembered something from before I lost my memory."

"Shoot," she said, then gave him a small, encouraging smile. "I'm sure, given time, things will start to come back to you. I know everyone keeps telling you that, but it's true, you just have to be patient."

"Yeah," Jensen answered out of politeness, not because he believed her.

Jensen watched her out of the corner of his eye as she moved around the bed and started to give him his daily check up. Jensen complied, going through the motions he'd been subjected to every day since he was moved up to the ward. As she wrapped the blood pressure cuff around his arm and it started to fill Jensen let his mind wander back to his dream, back to Jared.

Chris had said Jared wouldn't come because they ended badly, but how could he know that for sure? Nothing like this had happened to Jensen before so Chris couldn't possibly know for certain that Jared wouldn't come. Jensen needed him, he'd lost his memory and he needed Jared to help him get through it, to help him get his memories back. Then he could work out what ever it was that he did wrong, that made Jared leave him and fix it.

Nothing else mattered except getting Jared back, no matter what Chris thought.

Set on what he wanted, no, what he needed to do, Jensen waited for Nurse Cassidy to finish her tests and slip out of his room with a cheerful, "See you later!"

Once he was sure she was busy with the patient next door Jensen slipped out of bed, the linoleum cold under his bare feet. Jensen hissed for a moment, moving around the bed to the small set of drawers at the back of the room, searching around in his belongings for any change he could find.

From the pocket of the jeans he'd been wearing the night he was admitted he retrieved three quarters and decided they would have to do. Poking his head outside the door to his room Jensen checked that there weren't any stray members of staff that might notice him before slipping out. Padding down the hall as fast as he could without drawing any unnecessary attention to himself Jensen kept going until he reached the ward's waiting room and the payphone on the wall outside.

"Thank you," Jensen said under his breath as he pulled out the phone book, attached by a chain from the shelf underneath the phone. Flicking through until he hit the P's he ran his

finger down the page, looking for Padalecki, heart sinking to the bottom of his stomach as the only one listed was a Bob.

“Fuck,” Jensen cursed, slamming the book shut and resting his head against the wall. Disappointment flooded him, made him feel heavy and slow. The only way to find Jared was through Chris, and he had made his feelings on helping Jensen make contact with the one person he needed the most pretty clear.

Wiping his eyes with the back of his hand, Jensen felt the tug of something from deep in the recesses of his brain. Before he could question it Jensen dropped a quarter into the machine and dialed, fingers working over the numbers they seemed to know even though his brain didn’t.

Jensen held his breath as it started to ring, wondered if it was some sort of sense memory like Doctor Kripke had talked about or if he was dialing a complete stranger. After five rings it cut to voice mail, Jared’s voice down the line the best thing Jensen though he had ever heard, even though it hurt like hell.

“Hello, this is Jared Padalecki. I’m not able to answer the phone at this time, please leave your name and number and I will get back to you as soon as I can.”

Jensen couldn’t stop the tears that were suddenly blurring his vision from falling. Jared sounded different, voice deeper and smoother, professional and calm and Jensen wanted to know what else had changed about him too. How his face had matured, if he had ever gotten rid of the shaggy haircut that always fell in his face, if he had gotten any taller. Jensen wanted so much it hurt and all he had was Jared’s voice mail, to try and make him come.

“Jared,” Jensen croaked out, tempted to hang up to try and work out what to say, but afraid he wouldn’t have the nerve to phone again. “It’s Jensen. I know that you might not want to talk to me right now, but I need you to come and see me, please. I…Something’s happened and I really need you here. I’m in the neurology ward at Cedar Sinai. Please.” Jensen begged before putting the phone back in the cradle, choking on tears.

It would be a miracle if he came, but he had to. Jensen needed him.

*

After a week in the hospital being subjected to various degrees of questioning and testing Jensen was given the welcome news that he was being released for out patient treatment. Then reality kicked in and Jensen realized he was stuck in a city he never remembered moving too, knew only two people outside the hospital to speak of and had to check his wallet whenever he needed to know his address.

While he was itching, desperate, to get out of the hospital, going home didn’t seem like such an amazing prospect either. It really kind of sucked.

Both the hospital staff that had been taking care of him and Chris and Danneel kept encouraging him to be positive. Told him that sulking and dwelling on what happened wasn't going to help him get better, though Jensen figured he had pretty much all the right he wanted to sulk at the state of his life.

Jared was gone. It had been three days and he'd still not returned the messages Jensen had left on his answering machine. Jensen had tried calling every day since, chest aching and throat tight.

As much as Jensen had rallied against what Chris had said, the things that Danneel had implied, the longer Jensen waited, the more his life continued, he had to start facing the horrible truth. That maybe they were right. Maybe he really had turned into a jerk and a failure. Why else would Jared leave him? Not even come to the hospital when Jensen was hurt and alone and scared?

He didn't want to believe it, couldn't understand how it could have happened, how he could have ended up that way, but there was only so far he could deny it. Without his memories how was he going to know what had happened to him in the ten years he was missing, how he'd changed between then and now? It was a horrible thought, made him sick to his stomach, but now that he was being released he had to prepare himself for what he might experience in the outside world.

The hospital, as much as it frustrated and trapped and angered him, had been protecting him. It had let Chris and Danneel talk around his questions about a job and finishing school and pretty much everything else. He didn't know what kind of life was waiting for him, to try and fit back into, and their silence angered him more than one in his brain.

Chris had taken note of his release date and time, promised to come and collect him and take him home. As much as Jensen riled against Chris he was refusing to be shaken off, taking Jensen's insults and foul moods with an obnoxiously cheerful smile. It made Jensen's stomach heavy every time, the way Chris seemed so familiar with dealing with him being difficult. He didn't want to be difficult. He just wanted to be Jensen, nineteen and studying at UT San Antonio again, but that Jensen was lost and now it was time to face the one that was thirty and lived in LA.

"I know you're going to argue, but you're not going to win," Nurse Cassidy greeted with a wide smile as she entered his room, pushing a damn wheelchair.

"Come on!" Jensen groaned, "I'm leaving, you seriously want me to let you push me out this place in that thing?" He protested, glaring at the wheelchair in question, pretty much the only mode of transport he'd been allowed since he'd been admitted.

"It's the rules," Nurse Cassidy said and until he met her he would have sworn blind it wasn't possible to glare and look cheerful at the same time. "Now get your butt in this chair and we'll get you home. Chris is waiting at the Nurse's station."

Jensen grumbled as he finished lacing his sneakers before getting up and slumping down into the wheelchair. “Why didn’t he come in?”

“Maybe he could tell what a charming mood you’re in,” she replied grinning down at him, taking off the brakes. “You got everything.”

Jensen nodded. Chris had taken most of his things the day before when he visited. All he had left were a few things to get him through the night packed in a back pack that was almost falling apart, now sitting in his lap. Time to face the music, “Yeah, I’m ready.”

“And off we go,” Nurse Cassidy said as she turned the chair and maneuvered it and Jensen out his room and along the hall. Chris was standing at the end, as promised, by the nurse’s station with Doctor Ferris who smiled warmly as they stopped in front of her.

“Ready to face the outside world?” She asked, taking a clipboard from the Nurse’s station and scratching out something on it.

Jensen nodded, but felt a little sick at the prospect suddenly. “Yeah, I think so.”

“Well, Doctor Kripke agrees that you’re officially ready for release, though we’ll continue to treat and monitor you as an outpatient,” She said moving into her professional, no nonsense manner. “We’ve put together a pack of information for you on your appointments, therapy sessions and some information on the kind of pressures you’re going to be feeling once you start living on your own again.”

“You make me sound like an invalid,” Jensen protested, taking the folder she was now holding out to him and shoving it into the back pack with everything else.

Doctor Ferris gave him a stern look, “Things aren’t going to be easy. Don’t put too much pressure on yourself and let the people that care about you look after you, alright.”

“Don’t worry, Doc,” Chris drawled, oozing charm and totally shameless. “Me and Danni’ll keep an eye on him.”

“Good,” She said with a pleased smile before she turned back to Jensen, handing him the clipboard and a pen. “Now you just need to sign your discharge papers and you’ll be free to go.”

Jensen took the documents and hastily scribbled his name, handing them back he said, “Thanks doc,” as he tried to climb out the chair. Nurse Cassidy’s hand was firm on his shoulder pushing him back down into the seat.

“Not until we’re outside,” she said cheerfully before starting to push him towards the elevator, Chris chuckling as he followed behind them. Jensen scowled all the way to the front door where he was finally allowed the freedom of walking on his own two feet.

“Come on,” Chris said, patting him between the shoulder blades as he took his back pack, guiding him out the hospitals doors. “The car’s this way.”

Jensen nodded, eyes focused firmly on the ground, not wanting to look up and acknowledge the change in the landscape around him. It was warm out but the heat was all wrong, the air thick with pollution instead of heat, the air muggy instead of oppressive with dry heat. His chest ached, desperate for the familiarity of Texas.

“Look, I know this must be pretty weird for you, but you actually like it here,” Chris tried to assure him, but it did little to put Jensen at ease, everything was still wrong. Still felt wrong.

“Maybe I did,” Jensen replied softly as Chris lead him into the hospitals parking garage. “Before, but right now I just want to go home.”

“We’ll get there soon enough,” Chris grinned, stopping in front of a beat up red Ford truck. There was a sense of familiarity about it that Jensen couldn’t place, rubbed at the back of mind like an itch he couldn’t reach and he didn’t like it. He didn’t like feeling like there were things he should know, used to know, locked up inside his messed up brain. It was enough to let Chris’s comment slide, not point out to him he didn’t mean where ever Jensen was living in LA, but a little two bedroom apartment in San Antonio.

Chris lasted barely the time it took Jensen to get in the truck and click his belt into place before he was filling the silence with the sound of his own voice. “Of course, you don’t remember this truck but we’ve had some good times in this thing. Maybe it’ll help jog a few memories, huh?”

Jensen made a non committal noise in the back of his throat, squinted in the daylight as they pulled out of the garage and into the traffic. Nothing was coming back and he didn’t want to think about it, didn’t want to deal with the sharp stab of anger and frustration at himself.

“I had this truck in Texas, my old man gave it to me when I went to college to try and get me to drive back to Oklahoma to visit my momma more than just at the holidays.”

Jensen didn’t respond, just watched the unfamiliar city speed past as Chris continued to talk. “I never did visit them much, but that’s another story. This baby has taken me and you on more road trips than I can count, mainly between here and Texas. Home to your house for Christmas or Thanksgiving, you know those were some good times.”

Jensen grunted in acknowledgement, shutting his eyes against the emptiness that washed over him, not knowing where he was or anything of the stories that Chris had told him. Jensen didn’t think that he would ever get used to feeling like this, so empty and angry.

“You know if there was anything I could do to help, to give your memories back then I

would. All I can do is tell you what I remember," Chris said after a long moment of silence.

Jensen sighed, didn't really care if his lack of response was making Chris feel bad. He didn't ask for this, to have everyone know about his life, except for him. Really didn't want to hear other people remembering his life, not when the words came out with no spark of recognition, sounded like nothing more than a story about someone else's life.

"You need to help me out here, Jen," Chris finally said, voice soft.

Jensen opened his eyes and looked across the truck at Chris, "What do you want me to say?"

Chris shrugged as he made a turn, the neighborhood around them rapidly going down hill. "I dunno, man, something, anything. I'm trying, but you've got to tell me if you want me to shut up or keep talking, if I'm helping or not. I'm pretty lost too."

Jensen huffed, crossed his arms over his chest and resisted the urge to snipe out *yeah, it's so hard being you*. Instead, said, "I don't need you treating me like a kid."

"I'm trying to help," Chris said, pulling the truck into a space outside a run down looking apartment building.

"But you're not, alright?" Jensen snapped, hitting the breaking point that had been building for weeks, since Chris had showed up in hospital room knowing everything about Jensen's life. Knowing him while he was nothing but a total stranger to Jensen, his presence alone laying guilt heavy on Jensen's shoulders. "You sit there talking about a life I don't remember, hell, I don't even remember you. And I know you're doing this out of some kind of sense of duty or something, but I really don't need you putting pressure on me too."

"Putting pressure on you?" Chris gawked, having the nerve to look like he didn't know what Jensen was talking about.

"Yeah, to remember all the good old times we had," Jensen huffed in response, wished he knew where the hell he was and where he was going so he could get out the truck and away from Chris.

"You think that's what I'm doing?" Chris asked softly after he turned the engine off. Jensen could see him shifting in his seat to face Jensen out the corner of his eye.

Jensen swallowed, tried to stay angry instead of sagging in defeat. "Then what is it you're doing, Chris?"

"I'm trying to help," Chris repeated, reaching out to squeeze Jensen's shoulder, pulling back when he flinched at the touch. "But you've got to help me out here, tell me when

I’m not instead of sitting there getting pissy, because otherwise I’m not going to know.”

Jensen huffed again, tried to stop the anger at Chris from burning out and settling into the steady thrum of guilt that had been running through him. This was supposed to be his best friend, his new best friend and Jensen could barely remember his face. The pressure was unbearable.

“I don’t remember, okay,” Jensen finally said, tried to make his voice sharp but it came out sounding sad than anything else. “I don’t remember anything, least of all you and all these amazing memories and stuff you have of me, and I know I should. I know you want me to remember, so we can be friends again or something, but I can’t and I’ve got enough to feel shit about with adding that.”

“Jen,” Chris breathed, tugging at Jensen’s shoulder until he turned to look at him. “I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to make you feel like that… Of course I want you to remember, but not just for me, for you.”

“For me?”

Chris nodded, “You’re one of my best friends, man, and I can see the effect this is having on you.”

Jensen swallowed hard, felt more like an ass than before and it sat heavy in his stomach. So he deflected, “This is where I live?”

Chris watched Jensen for a long moment, where Jensen hoped he would just leave it all alone, and then leave Jensen alone to feel sorry for himself and the empty space inside his head. Then he cut Jensen a break, “Yeah, this is where you live. Shall we?”

Jensen nodded, followed Chris out of the truck and into the building. Chris pointed out Jensen’s buzzer wordlessly before putting a key in the lock of the front door and leading Jensen inside. “You don’t trust the elevator,” Chris pointed out as he led Jensen past it and up the four flights of stairs up to his apartment.

Looking down the corridor Jensen felt a sharp pull of familiarity for the dirty beige walls and brown carpet, tacky under his feet. *Third on the left*. Jensen reached out, grabbed Chris before he could stop himself, halting them both.

“Jen?” Chris questioned, clearly worried Jensen was about to have some kind of fit or something. Maybe he was.

“Third on the left,” Jensen said, not able to drag his eyes away from the hallway stretched out in front of him. He just knew it was the third on the left, he didn’t know the building name or the number of his apartment but he knew that was it, right next to the missing fire extinguisher.

“How d’you know that?” Chris asked, turning Jensen around to face him, forcing him out of his daze with his wide eyed confusion.

“I don’t know,” Jensen replied, looking between the door ahead of them and Chris. “I just…*did*.”

Chris broke out in a wide grin, slapping Jensen on the back cheerfully. “Don’t look so scared, this is a good thing!”

“It is?”

“Sure it is, that’s where you live,” Chris laughed. “You remembered.”

Jensen walked up the corridor and stopped outside the door, his door, the gold painted numbers of 405 peeling off the dark wood in front of him. Jensen felt sick, nausea churning his stomach and he didn’t think it would feel like this, that remembering would be like this. Just knowing, not actually remembering anything, and he didn’t like it. Didn’t like that he knew he had to turn the key to the right and jiggle it to open the door, but couldn’t remember ever having opened it before.

Jensen wanted his memory back, not the uncertain sense of just…knowing without explanation or understanding.

“Jen,” Chris said carefully, interrupting the whirlwind inside Jensen’s head, hand pressed lightly to his shoulder. “Talk to me.”

“I don’t remember,” Jensen replied quietly, unable to tear his eyes away from the front door. Wondering how much of this sensation was going to be waiting behind it for him, knowledge without memories. “I know, but I don’t remember.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, I don’t remember living here. I don’t remember walking down this hallway; I don’t remember ever opening this front door. I just…I just know this is it, this is where I live.”

“Isn’t that a good thing?” Chris questioned, sounding confused.

Jensen sighed, shook his head, “I want to *remember*.”

“Maybe when we get you inside-,” Chris began suggesting, obviously trying to be helpful.

Jensen shook his head, cut him off, “No…Thanks for bringing me here, Chris, but…I need to do this on my own.”

“Are you sure?” Chris sounded skeptical even as he held out Jensen’s keys for him.

“I’m sure,” Jensen said, taking them from him and jiggling the door key in the lock until it clicked, opening just a little.

Looking around at Chris he nodded and patted Jensen on the shoulder, saying, “okay,” before slipping away.

Jensen took a deep breath before stepping back into the life he didn’t remember.

*

“Is this really all we can afford?” Jensen asked with a sigh, looking up at the water stained ceiling, paint bubbles and peeling in the corners. The walls were a dirty brown that matched the carpet and the furniture looked like it had been there since the sixties, maybe even fifties judging by the condition.

“Pretty much, yeah,” Jared replied, wrapping his arms around Jensen’s waist from behind, pulling him back against his chest, solid and secure.

“Wow, this kinda sucks,” Jensen said after a long moment, taking the place in. How grubby and ramshackle it was, rattling wood framed windows and dented walls.

Jared laughed, kissed the shell of Jensen’s ear, “When you get a job, we can make it better.”

Jensen nodded, turned around in Jared’s arms so they were pressed chest to chest, Jared grinning down at him. “And for now, we’re here in LA and it’ll be ours. With one bedroom instead of two,” Jensen said, trying to look on the bright side.

“One bedroom,” Jared beamed back at Jensen, pressing him against the yellow, stained counter dividing the living area from the kitchen and kissing him softly. “That’s all ours.”

Jensen sat up in bed gasping, chest heaving as he tried to drag in oxygen to catch his breath and slow his pounding heart. A dream. He’d had a dream about him and Jared and the apartment, the apartment that he had been sleeping in, that was identical to the one in his dream.

Jensen kicked back the covers from his body, realized he was shaking as he put his feet down on the floor and asked himself, *was that real*?

Jensen followed his feet out of his room and across to the kitchen sink, filling a glass with water from the tap before swallowing it down in three long gulps. His hands were still shaking as he put the glass down on the counter and leant over the sink, breathing in deep and trying to calm down, get his head in order.

Being in the apartment had been like a continual sense of déjà vu. Jensen had known where things had belonged, which door lead to the closet and which one lead to his bedroom and bathroom. As long as he didn't focus to hard, think about what he wanted to know then his body seemed to find its way, hanging up his jacket almost absent-mindedly before he knew what he had done.

It had been just as frustrating as it had been in the hallway with Chris, the sense that his body knew these things, had for some time but his mind couldn't find the memories. Couldn't tell him how or why he knew where the glasses were or how to use the TV. He thought actually remembering something would be better.

It wasn't.

All it had been was a snapshot in time, like a scene from a movie he'd never seen and it had left him just as confused as before. His chest ached, the pain deep and sharp behind his ribs, he and Jared had been there. They had stood together in this room and settled on making it their home. How long ago had it been? Why had nothing changed? The paint was still peeling, the windows still rattling in the wind and the ceiling even more water stained.

Jensen had counted on remembering giving him answers, something to hold on to. Instead, it was almost as bad at not knowing. Maybe even worse.

*

"Yesterday was pretty stressful for you, so I'm going to forgive you being such a moody bitch and sending me away like some kind of naughty kid." Is what Chris opened with when Jensen pulled open his front door at eleven am on his first full day back in the real world, in the place that didn't feel like home.

"How kind of you," Jensen said with a casual shrug as Chris came inside, carrying two grocery bags.

"You bet your ass," Chris grinned, kicking the door shut behind him with his boot before putting the bags down on the kitchen counter. "Seeing as how I swung by the store this morning and picked you up some supplies, food and some other shit you're either missing or almost out of."

Jensen stared for a long moment, "Wow, thank you." Jensen really didn't deserve treatment like this with the way he'd been since the accident. Jensen stepped forward to help Chris empty out the bags, letting his hands move without thinking and help put things away as he swore to himself he would try and be better. He would really try to be less angry and rude to Chris when he was only trying to help, Danneel too.

Chris shrugged off the thanks, "It's nothing."

“It really isn’t,” Jensen insisted. “I mean, until all my new cards and PIN numbers arrive I don’t have any money, let alone know where a grocery store is.”

“I promised the doc I’d take care of you, so here I am, taking care of you. I don’t backtrack on my word,” Chris told him and Jensen wondered if he’d actually managed to insult Chris by thanking him.

“I know you did, I just…I just wanted you to know I appreciate that you’re doing this for me,” Jensen said, trying to smooth things over.

“Well, you can appreciate me by paying me back for the two months rent I just paid for you when you get yourself sorted again,” Chris replied as he opened the fridge to put some milk and OJ inside.

“What?” Jensen choked, Chris had to be joking…right?

“I don’t know much about your finances, Jen, but I know they’re not great so I’ve spoken to the landlord and covered you until after Christmas. Can’t have you homeless and memory-less, can we?”

Jensen gaped for long moment at the back of Chris’s head, wished he could see his face so he might just have a clue as to how to reply. Eventually Jensen settled on, “You didn’t have to do that.”

Chris shut the fridge and turned around to look at Jensen again, only glaring slightly this time. “Yeah, I did. You’re my buddy and right now, someone’s gotta look out for you.”

Jensen sighed, sock covered feet shuffling on the floor, felt guilty because he didn’t even remember this guy, even though he knew he should. “Look, I just want you to know that I really am grateful for all this. I know I’m not exactly the easiest person to be around right now.”

Chris shrugged again like it was nothing, “To be expected I guess. I get cranky when I wake up and I can’t remember what I did the night before, I figure I gotta cut you some serious slack right now. But some stuff will come back, it has to, right?”

Jensen bit his bottom lip and sucked in a deep breath as he thought about the night before. Waking up in a cold sweat, the dream of things he’d forgotten fresh in his mind, leaving him dissatisfied with questions and no answers.

“I’m not sure if I want it to,” Jensen said softly, not looking at Chris as he did.

To his credit, Chris didn’t explode in shock and expletives like Jensen was expecting him to. Instead he breathed in a couple of deep breaths before asking calmly, “Is this about what happened yesterday?”

“Yes,” Jensen answered then realized Chris was talking about when he brought Jensen back to the apartment. “No,” he corrected, he hadn’t told Chris about the dream yet, after all.

Chris just looked at him, eyebrows creeping up in confusion and Jensen huffed, “Something else happened yesterday. So yeah, it’s about yesterday but not what you think.”

“You gonna tell me or am I gonna have to force it out of you?” Chris smirked, leaning against the kitchen counter and crossing his arms over his chest. Jensen didn’t need to be a genius to know that not telling wasn’t an option.

“Last night I had a dream, I remembered something.”

Chris broke out into a grin, reached forward to slap the top of Jensen’s arm in congratulations. “Do I want to ask about the dream or was it NC-17 rated?”

Jensen shook his head, “It was nothing like that. It was here, Jared and me viewing this apartment.”

Chris’ smile fell a little, “You okay?”

Jensen nodded, it was a lie but it was what Chris wanted to hear. Jensen figured he should at least give him that much, not give him something else to worry about when it came to Jensen.

“So how does this equal not wanting to remember?”

Jensen rolled his head back, looked up at the yellowing ceiling and tried to find the words to explain how it had felt to Chris. “Ever since I woke up, since I found out about the amnesia all I’ve wanted is to remember. I thought being able to remember something, anything, would make me feel better.”

“And it hasn’t?”

Jensen shook his head, “I guess I convinced myself that once I started to remember I’d get some answers and instead, I’ve got just as many questions as I did before. Maybe more, and they’re even more frustrating because I remember standing in this apartment, it being all we could afford and it doesn’t tell me why we moved here, why Jared left me. It doesn’t tell me anything and I feel cheated. I’m not sure how much of this I can stand.”

Chris pushed away from the counter and closed the distance between them, curled his fingers around the tops of Jensen’s arms and waited until Jensen looked at him before speaking. “Dude, chill and read a pamphlet.”

Jensen felt his forehead crinkle in confusion as he looked at Chris, then laughed, couldn't help himself. "What?"

Chris grinned, "Seriously man, did you read any of the shit the hospital gave you yesterday? Because they gave me copies and I did."

Jensen hadn't, instead had filed it away as crap and he figured his guilt must have shown on his face as Chris rolled his eyes and said, "Read it. Seriously, it talks about this stuff. You're going to remember things that you're not going to like; you're going to have stuff like yesterday happen to you all the time. If you do remember stuff there's no guarantee what it'll be or how much you'll understand it. Did you ignore them when they were warning you about all this stuff?" Chris said with a grin, like he didn't put it past him.

"No," Jensen groused, well okay, maybe a little. "It just didn't think it would be like this…this hard."

"The main point all those bits of paper made, and your docs too? It'll get better, so don't get angry at yourself and don't give up, moron."

Jensen snorted, "Have you ever considered a career in motivational speaking?"

Chris glared but it quickly broke into a smile, "Nice to see your sarcastic streak is still intact. Now, seeing as how I am an awesome friend, I suggest you put some coffee on before I take all my groceries back."

"Ass," Jensen said with affection as Chris retreated to sprawl across Jensen's couch like he owned it, before putting the coffee pot on. Once it had brewed and Jensen had poured them each a cup, Chris instructing him *none of that sugar and milk shit in mine*.

Jensen put Chris' coffee down beside the couch, figured the carpet was dark enough and gross enough to cope if it got spilled. Jensen curled up in the battered arm chair opposite the couch and was surprised to find the silence between them almost comfortable.

Eventually Jensen spoke, "Chris?"

"Jen?" He asked, cracking one eye open to look at him and Jensen hadn't even noticed he'd been trying for a nap.

"I need you to tell me. About me."

Chris snorted, "Narcissistic much?"

Jensen rolled his eyes and told him, "Don't be an idiot." This was important. "I don't know anything about myself and you've been ignoring me asking about college and jobs and pretty much everything. I'm not an idiot, I know that…that I've not been that great, but I need to know."

Chris sighed and hauled himself upright on the couch, watching Jensen intensely before warning, “You’re not going to like what you hear.”

Jensen nodded, felt sick to the bottom of his stomach not knowing who he was, what things he might have done. “I have to know.”

“Alright,” Chris agreed before he started to explain, Jensen’s heart sinking with every word.

Jensen had flunked his third year of college and instead of retaking the year he had dropped out, decided he was going to be a musician instead. He convinced Jared to move to LA so he could get famous, but instead he started sleeping around and got fired from every job he had. Then one day Jared had enough and left. Chris didn’t know how Jensen paid the rent, moving from job to job as he was fired or walked out before they got the chance. Then he’d met Danneel and declared that he was over Jared and straight now, even though everyone knew it was a lie. He flaked out on her all the time, only calling her up for a booty call or a loan and Chris figured Jensen must be dynamite in the sack because he couldn’t work out for the hell of him why a smart girl like her put up with their car crash of a relationship.

“Right,” Jensen said breaking the silence that followed, once Chris had laid his life and all the faults he didn’t remember out for him. He wiped the tears off his face he didn’t even realize he’d shed and wanted to vomit.

“You okay?” Chris asked and Jensen thought it was a stupid question, shook his head. “You need anything?”

Yes, he needed answers. “Why?”

Chris shrugged sadly, “I don’t know. Sorry, Jen.”

Now Jensen had to remember, he had to understand what had gone so wrong that he ended up such a mess. That he hurt the people around him so badly by being a walking disaster. That wasn’t what he wanted for his life, he wanted to be happy with Jared with a good job and a couple of dogs by now.

Instead he had turned into *this* and he was damn well certain it wasn’t going to happen again. He wasn’t going to screw up his life a second time around.

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“Jen,” Jared laughed from where he’d hidden himself in a massive and totally not subtle heap under the comforter on the bed. “This is totally abuse of college property.”

Jensen chuckled in the direction of the Jared shaped lump, trying hard not to make the

camera shake. Not that it really mattered seeing as Jared hiding, fully dressed no less, under the comforter wasn't exactly setting the mood. "If they don't want people filming themselves having sex then they shouldn't let students sign the camera's out over night."

"This is the real reason you signed up for those TV journalism classes, isn't it?"

"You're the one that suggest we make our own sex tape, I'd like to remind you Mr. Padalecki," Jensen said, trying to keep as much amusement out of his voice as possible. It didn't last long, as Jensen checked the camera's shot through the viewfinder, Jared's hand appeared from the end of the lump to flip him the bird.

"Fuck you, I was joking," Jared said, pulling his hand back under the safety of the comforter.

Jensen moved around to the side of the bed, located what he really hoped was Jared's head and leaned in, voice low as he said: "You fucking me is kind of the point."

That made Jared's head pop out from his hiding place, hair ruffled and cheeks flushed. Jensen grinned, and continued, nipping at Jared's ear softly between words. "I'll turn the camera off if you really want me to…but are you really telling me it doesn't turn you on, just a little bit?"

Jared whimpered quietly and Jensen really hoped the camera's microphone had picked that up because in Jensen's opinion it was one of the best and most perfect sounds in the world. And he wanted it recorded on tape forever, a record that only he could get that noise out of Jared, just with the simplest of touches.

"Because just thinking about being able to watch ourselves, how fucking amazing we look together is enough to make me hard," Jensen said as he pressed butterfly kisses down Jared's neck as his head rolled back, exposing more salty sweet stretches of skin for Jensen to explore. "Imagine how much fun we could have, how good it would be to have me inside you while you're watching yourself fuck me on the TV screen?"

"Jen," Jared gasped, hands scrabbling from under the comforter to touch Jensen, one hand curling in his hair, keeping him close and the other pushing under the waist of his tee, warm against his belly.

"Shall I turn it off?" Jensen asked into that patch of soft and sensitive skin behind Jared's ear, enjoying the shudder it sent through Jared's body.

"No!" Jared exclaimed, halfway between a shout and a moan, clutching on tighter to Jensen at the threat of him pulling away. "No," Jared said again, soft and breathy as his eyes fluttered shut and he searched out Jensen's lips with his own. "I want it, Jen, I want it."

"Good," Jensen breathed against Jared's lips, warm and firm beneath his own, "this is

gonna be good."

Jensen pulled the comforter away from Jared as they kissed slowly, the easy press of lips and lazy tangling of tongues, drawing it out instead of the heady rush of faster, harder, now. Once the comforter hit the ground beside the bed with a low thump, Jensen eased himself and Jared back down onto the mattress, guiding Jared down on top of him until they were settled, wrapped around each other and touching from lips to toes.

This was how Jensen liked it best, slow and easy and full of love. Fast and rough was fun when they were desperate for each other and hot and flushed with need, but this is what he wanted to remember. The lazy kisses, the slow and careful touches to draw out moans and whimpers and gasps before they made love and all that followed. What was really between them and what it meant would always be better than a quick fuck captured on tape.

"Why do I let you talk me into these things?" Jared asked into Jensen's lips, hands pushing under Jensen's tee and sliding up his chest, hands hot against his skin as they pushed his shirt up with them and traced over the bumps of his ribs.

Jensen's breath hitched as Jared thumbed his nipples, teasing them to hardness as Jensen arched into his hands, trying to answer. "Because you love me."

"Yeah, I kinda do," Jared said softly pulling back from Jensen enough so that he could see the silly grin and the love in his eyes. "Kinda a whole lot."

"Good," Jensen said with a grin before tugging Jared back down, licking into his mouth as his hands slid Jared's shirt up his chest.

Eventually breaking the kiss for air, Jared slowly stripped them both, mapping out Jensen's skin with his hands and lips. He eased Jensen's legs apart and licked him open, tongue hot and wet, so perfect inside him, making him writhe and gasp and moan. One lube slick finger, then two, then three working him open and pressing against his prostate until Jensen was begging, breathy and needy. "Come on, Jay, want you…I'm ready, please, need you inside me."

Jared crawled up Jensen's body, pressing kisses along Jensen's jaw to his lips as he pressed in, filling Jensen in one smooth stroke. "God, so perfect," Jared murmured into Jensen's lips as his hips rolled, pulled Jared in deeper.

Jared set an easy rhythm as Jensen moved with him, hips canting to meet each thrust as they shared breathy moans and lazy kisses until Jared curled his fingers around his dick, until they were coming.

Jensen woke up panting, heart pounding and chest heaving. "Fuck," he groaned shifting on the couch where he must have fallen asleep, the inside of his boxers wet. If he hadn't

remembered the dream in painful clarity then they would have said enough.

God, Jared.

Jensen scrubbed a hand over his face, trying to stop his head from spinning and pushed away the memory of Jared's lips against his, the way he felt inside him. A glance at his watch told him he'd been out for a couple of hours and Jensen wished like hell he'd not fallen asleep, not when he had that waiting for him. He felt dirty and ashamed.

Jensen didn't know when the memory was from, only that they it had been at college sometime after his memories stopped. When he had thought about things coming back, wanting to remember so desperately in the hospital he never thought about this. That he would remember all the times that he and Jared were together, the kisses they shared, the times they made love and Jared saying I love you.

Jensen didn't just want to remember them, he wanted them back and he didn't know if he could face having them come back to him like this. Not when Jared still hadn't returned his calls, when Jensen was so desperate just to hear his voice, see his face and touch him again.

Jensen had to see Jared, he couldn't keep on this way not when there was a chance that they could make things right. That once Jensen explained what had happened to him Jared would understand, would help make things right.

If Jensen's fingers knew Jared's number then he must have his address somewhere. As Jensen climbed into the shower and washed the drying come off of himself he swore that he would find Jared and they would talk.

Jensen had to see him. He had to.

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Jensen sat in the back of the cab for a long minute, eyes flicking up and down between the piece of paper in his hand with 2517 Cedar Grove written on it and the house they were parked outside of. The neighborhood was peaceful and domestic, kid's bikes littered driveways and it was like something out of a surreal nightmare, happy homes with white picket fences. How could Jared live here? This wasn't what they wanted, this wasn't what Jared had wanted. Was it?

Jensen cursed, trying to remember, but nothing came but the familiar blankness in the place of where memories should be. Frustration seared through his veins and his own inability to recall what had happened, when Jared had started wanting a two up two down, decorated in pastel colors with a porch swing and sprinklers on the front lawn. Chris had told Jensen that Jared had changed, that he wouldn't be the same but Jensen hadn't believed it, hadn't wanted to believe it. Faced with the life that Jared now had, the life that he seemed to have chosen, Jensen choked on the memories he did have, the ones

of before he had been clinging onto since this whole nightmare had begun. The bright walls of their apartment, the plans to move to San Francisco after college, get a place together in the Castro, somewhere different where they could be themselves, together. Where they didn't have to fit into the perfect apple pie life that everyone had planned for them. The life Jared seemed to be living.

"You getting out or what?" The cab driver snapped, looking at Jensen in the rear view mirror and jerking him out of the panic that was rising in him, making his chest tight and it hard to breathe.

"Yeah, sorry," Jensen muttered in response, digging in his pocket for his wallet he handed the driver two twenties before climbing out. Eyes focused on the house in front of him, a bright red and shining new Mini Cooper in the driveway. The front lawn was as immaculate as the house, bright white in the sun of the late afternoon, like it was something out of a TV show instead of real life.

Fear froze Jensen to the spot, knees locked by the terror of what waited for him behind the dark wood front door, of seeing Jared. No matter how much Chris had said it was a bad idea, how could Jensen listen to him? A man he didn't even know, had only ever seen in passing at college and a couple of parties, even if he did know more about Jensen's life than he did himself. It didn't matter that years had passed for Jared, they hadn't for Jensen and the memories of them together were so fresh Jensen could swear it was only a couple of weeks ago they were playing footsie in the back of the library, failing to study.

He'd not just lost his memories but the one thing that could pull him through this, the person he loved more than anything. Jared. If he was going to get through this, he needed Jared. Needed him to hold him and tell him everything was going to be alright, help him find the ten years of lost memories that he had to get back, was desperate to remember.

Jensen didn't know how long he stood outside Jared's house, the toes of his sneakers barely over the line of the stone path that lead across the lawn and up to the house. As much as Jensen willed himself, his feet, to move, he couldn't, paralyzed with fear until suddenly there was someone jogging past him and up to the house.

She was short, with her long dark hair pulled up into a ponytail, the ends of which clung to the back of her neck, damp with sweat. She was wearing jogging pants, running shoes and a zip up windbreaker jacket that all matched perfectly. Beside her huffed and panted two large dogs, the leashes in her hand and she turned to face Jensen, leaning down do rest her hands on her knees as she breathed deep.

She smiled warmly at Jensen, like she'd known him all her life, her big brown eyes happy and friendly, "Can I help you?" She asked when she'd finally caught her breath enough to speak, and stand up straight.

"I…" Jensen stammered, not sure what he was supposed to think. Who was she, did she live here? She couldn't have anything to do with Jared, she was to old to be friends with

Megan, even if Megan wasn't a giggling teenager anymore. "You live here?" Jensen finally managed to ask as she let the dogs off their leash, shooing them over the two water bowls that sat on the front porch.

Even though Jensen knew in the pit of his stomach that she did, he hoped that she'd answer no. That's she's a dog sitter, or a house sitter, anything but someone close to Jared, not when she was so pretty and perky, everything Jensen wasn't anymore.

"Yeah, I do. I'm Sandra. Sandy McCoy," She beamed offering her hand briefly before pulling it back and laughing girlishly. "Actually, I won't make you shake my hand, it's all sweaty and gross."

"Sandy?" Jensen said the name, tried it out on his tongue and it felt familiar, but like so many other things he didn't know why. Just knew that it meant something to him once, that there were memories and emotions there, but they wouldn't come. He tensed with frustration, desperate to remember, but like with everything else he just hit the brick wall between himself and his memory.

"That's me," she grinned, unzipping the windbreaker to reveal a sweat damp jogging shirt. "What can I do for you?"

"I think I've got the wrong house, I'm looking for Jared. Jared Padalecki."

"No, you've got the right house, he's my fiancé."

"Fiancé?" Jensen's heart stopped.

"Yeah, things are just starting to get crazy, now that we're actually planning the wedding. All I can think about lately are dress fittings and tables plans and how many people are going to show up and where should we have our gift list…and oh my gosh. I'm sorry, you don't want to hear about all this. You're looking for Jared right?"

"Yeah," Jensen managed to croak out, still shell shocked.

"He's at work right now, I know, working on a Saturday, what's that about, huh? But he couldn't get out of it 'cause he hates being the bad guy and saying no. He should be home a little after three, if you want to come back, or I could always give him a message."

"Er, no, it's okay," Jensen managed to answer, though he didn't know how. Every part of him trying to process that Jared had moved on. With a woman, a woman he was going to marry. He didn't know what to think, how to process the news, all he did know was that he had to get out of there.

"Are you sure?" She asked, obviously attempting to be helpful, it was the last thing Jensen needed. "I can ask him to give you call, if you'd prefer?"

"Really, no, it's fine," he assured, trying to stop his voice from shaking, showing that inside he was falling apart. "It's nothing important anyway."

"Oh, okay, only if you're sure," she said with a smile, though it was faltering as she studied Jensen. "It was nice to meet you."

"Yeah.. Um.. You too," Jensen managed, before turning on his heels and running.

*

"Did you come to my house today?" Was hissed down the phone line with a venom that made Jensen's insides go cold when he answered his phone to the withheld number, defiantly ignoring Chris' instructions to let him deal with everything.

"What?" He stuttered, afraid of what new revelation into the past ten years the angry caller would reveal. "Who is this?"

"You heard me Jensen, now stop playing the dumb shit part and answer me," The voice continued and Jensen wished that he could place it, it felt familiar but wrong. "Did you come to my house today?"

Jensen gasped, hissed in a deep breath in shock as it hit him who is was, why they voice was familiar. "Jared…is that you?" His voice sounded so different to what had been on his answering machine, the anger and hate that filled it made Jensen tremble. Easy going, never raised his voice and never got mad at anyone, especially not Jensen, Jared was furious. Furious at him.

"Who else's fiancé did you harass today?" Jared bit out in return.

Jensen swallowed, unable to find any of the words that he had wanted to say to Jared when he went to his house in search of the man he loved. The hate Jared so clearly felt for Jensen, the anger he harbored towards him, stole everything from inside Jensen aside from longing for the way things were.

"Answer me!" Jared demanded.

"I'm sorry," Jensen forced out, voice trembling. "I was looking for you…I just wanted to talk to you."

"Why do you keep doing this to me? Do you get some sick pleasure out of this?"

"I don't…"

"No, don't bother answering. Just when I thought I'd gotten you out of my life, you come back and screw with me. You're lucky Sandy didn't realize it was you until after you'd gone. I was serious about what I said last time Jensen, you come near us again and I'm

calling the cops."

"Jared, please," Jensen pleaded, afraid his voice was going to break. What the hell was going on that Jared would be like this to him? What had he done?

"I'm happy and I'm not going to let you ruin that. Not anymore."

"Please, just Jared, just listen to me," Jensen rushed out. He needed to explain, make Jared understand what had happened to him. He needed Jared, didn't think he could do this without him.

"What can you possibly have to say to me that I should listen to? After all you've done to me, to Sandy, our friends, everyone."

"Just let me explain," Jensen begged, didn't know what else there was he could do.

"I'll give you this much Jensen, you've gotten better at faking it. Doesn't mean I'm going to fall for it, though," Jared said, voice level and cold. Then there was nothing but the dialing tone.

Jared had hung up.

Big Bang 2009 || Part Four

Jensen waited for Jared to leave the house, watching him from his vantage point down the road in Danni's Toyota as he got into his truck and pulled out the driveway, the replacement stood in doorway of their picture perfect house waving goodbye. Jensen tracked Jared's progress down the road, until he turned off and out of sight, and she vanished back inside. He waited for ten minutes, watching the doorway to make sure she didn't leave, giving Jared the general grace time of him realizing he'd forgotten something and turning back to collect it.

When Jared didn't return to the house, obviously not missing anything that day he climbed out of Danni's car, grabbing the video tape from the passenger seat before slamming the door shut behind him. Grinning smug and wide to himself Jensen made his way up the street to Jared's new house, climbing up the porch steps and rapping cheerfully on the door.

Inside Jensen could hear a rising commotion, the scrabbling and clattering and high pitched yapping that unmistakably belonged to dogs. Jensen frowned, since when did Jared have time for pets?

Snorting Jensen thought to himself, maybe the new girlfriend, sorry, fiancé, was the dog sitter. He decided that it would be pretty fitting.

After a few minutes she pulled open the front door, out of breath but still smiling. Jensen hated her even more, so much it made his blood ache in his veins as it pounded through his body.

"Hi, sorry I was just getting the dogs ready for their walk," she said reaching down to grab the collar of the dog that was currently trying to push past her legs and out the door to get at Jensen.

Instantly Jensen plastered on a cheerful smile, like he didn't have a care in the world and he didn't want to stick a knife in the chest of the bitch in front of him. There wasn't any point in doing this if he wasn't going to go the whole way and make it believable. It wouldn't have the full effect otherwise, which would just take half the fun, and satisfaction, out of it.

"That's okay," Jensen grinned, leaning forward to give the dog a scritch behind the ears, which made its tail wag and bash against his replacement's leg. "You must be Sandy, right?" As much as being pleasant to her made Jensen want to hit something, preferably Jared, he reminded himself that it would be worth it in the end. "I'm a friend of Jared's from college."

"Oh," she said, her face falling a little as she managed to get the dog back inside and behind her legs. "You just missed him, by like, five minutes. He's gone to work and won't be home until late tonight."

Jensen's grin widened. Perfect. That meant there was plenty of time for her to get curious enough to watch the tape before Jared got home, and for the sparks to start to fly. "Well, that's okay because it was you that I really wanted to see."

"Me?" She laughed, looking a little confused. "I'm not sure why, but okay then, do you want to come in?" She offered, gesturing behind her and Jensen had to contain the look of disgust that wanted to cover his face just at the thought of being inside their home. Somewhere that Jared lived and slept with someone that wasn't him, instead of being where he should want to be, at home with Jensen.

Jensen shook his head and lied, "Oh no, it's alright, I have to get to work soon, but thank you for the offer. I came by because I heard from Jared that congratulations were in order."

As Sandy beamed and gushed thanks, Jensen wanted to vomit, especially when she flashed him the rock on her finger, boasting how beautiful it was and how Jared picked it all by himself. She didn't deserve to be happy, not when she'd stolen Jared away from him, made sure that he'd never realize what he'd walked out on and come back to Jensen.

"I thought I'd drop around a little engagement present for you," Jensen grinned proudly, holding up the video tape wrapped neatly in silver paper and finished with a gold ribbon and bow. This would show perfect little Sandy exactly what her future husband was

keeping from her. The dirty secret shut tight inside the closet Jensen thought Jared had left behind long ago. The one he got back in to try and convince himself that he didn't need Jensen anymore. Jensen couldn't wait to see how well that lasted once she knew the truth.

"Oh wow," Sandy said, laughing softly as she turned the package over in her hands, studying it. "You really didn't have to."

"Oh but I wanted to," Jensen smirked. Now that was the truth, just not for the reasons Sandy would think, and Jensen couldn't help but subtly rub it in. "You both should get a real kick out of it. And I figure, if you're committing yourself to the Sasquatch for the rest of your life, you should at least know what he got up to in college first."

"Why do I get the feeling this is going to embarrass him?" She giggled, shaking it to produce the telltale rattle of a video tape from the present.

Jensen grinned even wider and felt like a Cheshire cat. One that just got the cream. She had no idea how much it was going to embarrass Jared and that just made it even better. "Do I look like the kind of guy that would do that?"

"Maybe," she said with a grin, "but thanks anyway. It'll be fun to watch, he never talks about when he was at college."

"He doesn't?" Jensen's smile and false demeanor of friendly cheerfulness almost slipped at her words. He already knew that Jared hadn't told her about him, he couldn't have, but that still didn't make it sting any less to know that he never talked about the four years they lived together. In the safety of the world Texas U created around them where the only things they had to care about was whether to stay in or go out and the paper due at the end of the month.

She shook her head and her smile turned a little sad, "No, he's all about the here and now. Doesn't like to talk about his past at all, really. Look, I really should take these silly mutts out before they tear the place up," she said gesturing back into the house as the dogs started to make a commotion of noise behind her again. "But it was so nice to meet you, do you want me to tell Jared you stopped by? Ask him to give you a call?"

"No, its fine thanks," Jensen smirked, there wasn't much need for him to give his game away now by asking Jared to call. Not when he was certain as soon as Sandy sat and watched the tape he'd be hearing from Jared. There was no way that Sandy wouldn't confront Jared, not when she found out why he didn't want to talk about his college years. “I'm sure I'll be hearing from him when he sees what I just gave you."

"Okay, you take care now," she said waving Jensen goodbye as he turned away and headed down the porch steps and back to Danni's car.

"You too," Jensen smirked to himself.

Oh yeah, that went well.

Jensen was surprised by how long it took his phone to ring, buzzing out the tinny electric version of Poison, indicating that Sandy had finally watched the tape and Jared had found out about it. Oh, this was just going to be awesome.

Jensen settled back into his couch, where he'd spent most of the last six hours since he delivered the tape waiting for Jared to call and let him go to voicemail three times before leaning over and picking up the phone. On the final ring before Jared would hit voicemail for the fourth time Jensen flipped the phone open and made like he didn't still have Jared's number programmed into his phone, with his very own ring tone.

"Hello?" He asked casually.

Jared didn't bother with any of the pleasantries, not that Jensen expected him to, he hadn't since they split up and had used them even less since he started fucking around with her. "Why would you do that to me?"

Jensen felt a little disappointed by Jared's opening tone, the defeated pleading note to it. Jensen had been hoping for some serious anger, make Jared show the temper that Jensen knew he tried to keep hidden under the surface, never let anyone see. There was only one thing for it, pressing Jared's buttons until he really blew. Jensen just hoped that Sandy was around to watch him go.

So Jensen said: "I'm sorry, who is this?" He didn't bother to hide the amused lilt in his voice, knew it would just wind Jared up even further, and it did.

"You know damn well who it is," Jared hissed down the line and Jensen grinned. Jared was well on his way, his tone getting lower and more aggressive with each passing word. Danger signs Jensen had learned well in the last few years together, even more so in the ones since. "Why? Why did you do this to me? To Sandy?"

"Do what?" Jensen's feigned innocence was almost spoiled by laughter that bubbled up inside his chest, desperate to escape, but he managed to contain it.

"Don't play dumb with me," Jared growled and Jensen couldn't stop the shiver of desire that ran down his spine, red hot and desperate. Jensen remembered that voice, that growl in his ear as Jared held him down and fucked him hard, desperate and aggressive and made for sex. "You're the only person with a copy of that tape and did you really think she wouldn't recognize you once she saw it?"

"Hey, I was just trying to do the future Mrs. Padalecki a favor," Jensen said with so much faked sincerity he almost believed it himself. Though he knew it wouldn't get past Jared, that was the whole point of it.

"By giving her a copy of our sex tape as an engagement present! How exactly does that work in your sick head, Jen?" Jared shouted down the line and that was what Jensen was looking for.

"She deserves to know what she's getting herself into with you," Jensen said snidely. They both knew it wasn't about doing Sandy a favor for her own good, instead it was about making them both suffer the consequences of the truth Jared was so determined to hide. "Where your tastes really lie in the bedroom. Where you've been."

"What makes you think I hadn't already told her?" Jared asked and Jensen almost didn't bother answering, but couldn't resist rubbing his success in a little further.

"Because I know you. Not to mention the fact that you wouldn't be this mad if she knew about me and you."

"This isn't fair, Jensen, that you keep doing this to me."

"You're hardly one to talk about fair, Jared," Jensen snapped back.

"I gave you all the chances in the world and then some, and all you did was throw them back in my face. If you want to punish anyone, punish yourself for pushing me away. I've moved on, you should too."

"You left, Jared. Not me, you walked out and ended it."

"You didn't give me any other choice. So I moved on and found someone else, and even now you can't let me be happy. I swear Jensen, if you come near me or Sandy again I'm calling the cops. This stops now."

Jared slammed the phone down before Jensen could reply, leaving him with the low buzz of the dialing tone in his ear, and a shit eating grin on his face. Jared had reacted perfectly, just like Jensen had wanted, and so Jensen kicked back, light up a cigarette and cracked open the bottle of cheap whiskey he'd had waiting to celebrate a job well done.

Just because Jared wanted to act like Jensen had never happened to him, didn't mean he was going to get it.

Jensen woke in a cold sweat, jerking bolt upright as his chest heaved, sucking in a desperate and deep lungful of air. Automatically he reached out for Jared on his side of the bed, the empty mattress and foreign room sliding into loose focus brought Jensen crashing back to reality. Jared was gone and so was Jensen's memory.

Jensen's dream clung hard in his mind, the pretty brunette that Jared would soon make his wife etched inside Jensen's eyelids and the harsh anger of Jared's words ringing in his ears. As Jensen's breathing started to calm he slumped back down into his rapidly

cooling, damp sheets and shuddered, waiting for the dream to fade. But it didn't slip away and when Jensen closed his eyes he saw flashes of himself, things he didn't remember dreaming.

There was silver wrapping paper somewhere, Jensen knew it as he searched through the his bedroom, under the bed, in the bottom of his draw filled with crap, sex toys, guitar strings, hash-pipes, paper and tobacco. Jensen knew that he had some left from Danneel's birthday present that had been purchased weeks too late, not that he cared that much. This was more important, making sure that Jared didn't sweep Jensen under the rug like a dirty little secret, that his new toy knew exactly what she was getting herself into. Jensen smiled triumphantly as he found a silver paper sticking out from between magazines in his porn pile. Perfect.

Jensen drew in a shaky breath and pulled himself back upright, trying to blink away the memories that were creeping back. The calculation and the planning, the need to lash out and hurt burning in his chest like a fire, if that who Jensen was, how he felt, then he didn't want it back. Didn't blame Jared for leaving him, for being angry that he tried to come back into his life.

How could that have been him?

How could he have been so malicious?

The two video tapes stared at him from where they sat on the counter top of the breakfast bar that separated the kitchen from the rest of his crappy and cramped apartment. There was no point in handing over both of them, one was enough to get his message across and it wasn't like she would actually watch a second tape, not after seeing the first. Not with what was on them, anyway.

Jensen took a long slug of his beer, eyes firmly on the tapes as he set the condensation damp bottle down on the counter and picked up his joint and took a deep pull. A long hold, then smooth exhale and Jensen felt the warm tendrils of relaxation creep down his spine, easing the tension in his muscles and bones.

Both tapes had their merits of course but Jensen had to decide exactly what message he wanted to send to the happy couple. Did he go with the tape from 2000, which was young and hopeful, loving and full of laughter? Or did he go with the tape from 2003, angry and dirty and desperate?

Jensen smirked, joint between his lips again. Was there any question? It had to be the '03 tape.

Jensen's hands trembled as he reached out for the phone, fumbling twice before his fingers curled around it and lifted it to him. The display read ten after three in the morning and he groaned. His thumb hovered over his list of contacts as he tried to decide

who to call, muttering ‘Sorry Danni’ to the darkness he scrolled down to her number and hit dial.

Jensen listened to six long rings down the line before Danni answered, during which he tried and failed to put the things he remembered out of his mind, to even his breathing and stop shaking.

“Jens’n?” Danni mumbled, her voice husky with sleep and Jensen didn’t think she was really awake.

“Yeah, it’s me,” Jensen replied, voice little more than a whisper as a fierce wave of guilt flooded him for doing this to her. It wasn’t her job anymore to be woken up in the middle of the night by Jensen and he had no right to ask anything of her any longer.

“What time s’it?” She asked with a sleepy snuffle followed up by a yawn.

“After three,” Jensen managed to make himself answer, the shame almost choking him. After discovering what a malicious bastard he was before he lost his memory he did this to Danneel, a woman he had treated as badly, if not worse, by all accounts.

As much as Jensen wanted to believe it wasn’t real, that the things he had remembered weren’t memories, but nightmares, he couldn’t. Not when he could call upon the woman he’d hurt, who owed him nothing, in the middle of the night in the hope of having his conscience eased.

“What are you doing awake?”

Jensen couldn’t answer, instead listened to the shuffle of sheets and blankets underneath the sound of Danneel’s breathing, low and even. The soothing silence dragged on until she sighed and spoke again.

“Jensen? Did you phone me to talk or to listen to me breathe?” She teased softly and with the lightness in her voice, Jensen couldn’t put this on her. Not then.

“I’m not used to sleeping alone,” he confessed instead. Not the reason he called, but the truth none the less.

“You want me to talk?” She said around another yawn. “You’ve got about an hour before my alarm goes off.”

Jensen wanted to say no, not to be any more selfish than he already had been, but somehow the word “yes” fell out of his mouth before he could stop it.

There were several more sounds of shifting covers and the creak of a mattress as Jensen imagined Danneel settling herself in bed, and Jensen did the same. He laid back down and curled himself in his covers, shut his eyes and let the sound of her breathing soothe

him.

“What do you want me to talk about?”

“Tell me about you,” Jensen requested, “I want to get to know you.”

“Okay,” Danneel agreed, her voice doing little to hide her shock, but she spoke none the less. “My name is Danneel Harris, I was born in Louisiana, I’m actress and right now I’m working on this show called One Tree Hill…”

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"Jensen, you're coming to my place for dinner and I'm not taking no for an answer. Doctor Kripke said that you shouldn't be left alone for too long while you're still so disorientated and that you need to take care of yourself. So shut up and let me look after you, okay?" Danneel told him firmly. He may not remember her but the face she was pulling was universal. She'd made up her mind and she wasn't budging, no matter how much Jensen wanted to stay at home on his own and feel sorry for himself after the total disaster that had been trying to get in contact with Jared.

"Warned you not to argue with the lady," Chris said slapping his back as he passed Jensen to get out the door. "I'll swing by tomorrow and see how you're doing."

"I don't need babysitting," Jensen snapped harshly before he could stop himself. He knew he should be glad that he had these people, because as much as he didn't want to believe it, the more he lived his new life the more it seemed like he'd been alone for some time. No one had stopped by or called since he got out of the hospital except for Chris and now Danneel. Without the pair of them he wasn't sure what he would be able to do, but that didn't stop the frustration at being mothered like he couldn't look after himself, that no matter how hard he tried he couldn't remember. Most of all he was pissed off at the fact that he did need them and the one person that he wanted most of all, he'd lost, and it was becoming more and more apparent it had been his fault.

That didn’t change the fact that Jensen didn't want Danneel or Chris. All he wanted was Jared.

Chris stared at Jensen for a moment before he hit back with, "Maybe if you stop acting like a kid and accepted that your friends are worried about you, then maybe we wouldn't think you do." Turning to Danneel he started to pull his jacket on, "I'll see ya' later, Danni," he said before kissing her cheek and then vanished out of site with a wave to her and a glare aimed in Jensen's direction.

"You shouldn't listen to him," Danneel said with a sigh after she'd finished watching Chris go. "Or at least, don't take what he says to heart. This is tough for him too, you know."

Jensen snorted and Danneel glared, crossing her arms over her chest as she pushed past him and into his apartment.

"Don't be an ass," She eventually said, moving through the place picking up items which he had assumed belonged to her and stacking them in a pile on the breakfast bar. "I'm not saying this isn't hard for you and I'm not saying that it's harder for him, or me, but it's time to stop acting like a selfish dick and realize that this doesn't just affect you." She stopped and took a deep breath and brushed her hair out of her face before putting her hands on her hips.

"Look, I know you don't know this, but Chris has been your best friend for ten years. And all of a sudden all that you can remember of him is seeing his face at a couple of parties in college, which was almost eleven years ago for him. God knows why, but for some reason, despite the fact that you're a gigantic ass most of the time, he's pretty attached to you. And don't you even let me get started on me and you.

“The thing is, we're here and we're looking out for you, because we care about you. You must know that or you wouldn’t have called me last night. So, the least you could do is try and act a little bit like it matters to you, even if it doesn't, because this isn't exactly a walk in the park for us either." She huffed a deep breath and dropped her hands, "Okay, I'm done bitching. For now. I'm going go get the rest of my stuff from the bedroom and then we'll head out. You might want to put some shoes on, maybe a jacket too. I've got the top down on the car."

Jensen followed her instructions, let the sense of memory he didn't understand lead him to the closet that had a pile of shoes in the bottom and jackets hanging from the hooks on the inside of the door, between his bedroom and the edge of the kitchen area. By the time Danneel appeared from his room with a pink leather purse in her hand, he was stood by the apartment door, waiting, ready as instructed.

"I always say that you should clean this place up," Danneel said conversationally, as she hustled him out the door, pulling a key out of her purse to lock it behind her. "Maybe you'll actually listen to me now."

"I've never been one for cleaning," Jensen said softly. It was always Jared who was the clean freak, which in turn made him a neat freak as well. No one ever thought it was that way around, but Jared's ability to tolerate mess had always been limited, even when they were kids. Jared's momma had never had to make his bed after he turned thirteen because he'd started doing it himself, unprompted, which Jensen had always called him a freak for. When they'd started living together Jared had declared that it was his mission to make Jensen both neat and tidy. Jensen figured that Jared failed, but he wished he knew if he'd given up trying or if it had been Jensen that failed.

"I suppose I should give you your key back," Danneel continued to fill the silence as they walked down the stairs to the building's small, dingy lobby and Jensen let her, unsure what he was supposed to say. What he had to say. It was the same as when he'd been with

Chris, the world was a foreign place to him and even his small talk was out of date, and the last thing he wanted to talk about was himself anymore, to have people he didn't even remember knowing telling him things about his life that he couldn't remember.

"Though, I guess I should probably keep it for now, while you're still getting used to things. Unless, you really don't want me having it."

It took Jensen a moment to realize that she'd been silent because she was waiting for him to answer, so he shrugged, indifferent about the whole thing. What did another person that he didn't really know walking in and out of the place that was supposed to be his home, but didn't feel like it, matter? "No, I don't mind."

"Okay," Danneel smiled and dropped the single key on a chain into her purse. "This is me," she said stopping in front of a silver Audi convertible, with the top down just like she'd said. "Get in," she instructed after she'd unlocked the car with two bleeps from the key and Jensen just stood there staring at the car. There was something about it, something that sparked at the back of his brain, a memory so close he could almost recall it, but it wouldn't come. He clenched his fists in annoyance once he'd climbed in and slammed the door shut.

Danneel stopped what she was doing, tugging her hair into a messy pony tail, sunglasses now perched on her nose, to stare at him opened mouthed before chiding: "Do you mind! Beat up your own car, not mine."

"Sorry," Jensen groused, though he knew that it was clear that he didn't mean it.

"What?" Danneel asked, dropping her hands to rest on her thighs, making no indication that she was planning on leaving and therefore removing the need for Jensen to answer, which is what he wanted to happen.

"I said I was sorry!" He snapped, crossing his arms across his chest and focusing his gaze across the street, firmly not on Danneel.

"That's not what I meant and you know it," she snapped and Jensen didn't need to be looking at her to know exactly what she looked like. A cross between frustration, concern and impatience. "What's with the sudden change from general apathy and indifference to pissiness?"

"It's this car okay," he said finally turning to look at her. "I know something about this car and its like, its right there in the back of my mind but I can't get at it. I know it's there but I still can't remember."

"You convinced me to buy this car," Danneel answered with a wry laugh and Jensen wasn't sure that he wanted to hear the rest of the story, wanted to know yet another shitty thing he'd done. "I wanted an SUV but you insisted on coming car shopping with me and when we got to the dealership you talked me into buying this. You said you thought it

was sexy. The night I went to collect it from the dealership you came with me, you said you wanted us to take it for a drive. We never made it for a drive, we fucked in the back seat. That was the only time you've ever been in this car, until now."

Danneel was braced against the door on her hands and knees, her hair sticking to her back as beads of sweat formed down her spine. "Jensen," she moaned, breathy and needy as he pressed back inside her, deliberately slow, teasing. She was hot and tight around him, rolling her hips back into his thrusts, pushing him deeper inside of her.

Jensen swallowed hard, unable for a moment to see anything but Danneel naked and desperate underneath him in the back seat of her car. "You have a tattoo…On your right butt cheek."

Danneel's cheeks flushed red and she started up the car, focusing on the road as she pulled out the parking spot and into the flow of traffic instead of Jensen as she answered. "Yeah, I do. That's your fault to."

"Is that actually my fault or are you just blaming me because I have amnesia and can't argue?" He tried to lighten the mood, distract her from the fact that he just remembered them having sex.

It made her laugh and Jensen watched as her face lit up and her shoulders shook a little with mirth. She was beautiful. Jensen had never really thought about women before, about being attracted to them, but watching her look so happy he thought maybe he knew what he'd seen in her.

"Yeah, it actually is your fault, and even with amnesia you're still arguing that it's not!" She grinned at him as they stopped at the lights. "We were drunk and you decided we should both get tattoos. So we went to this tattoo parlor in Hollywood and somehow you talked me into going first, I blame all the mojitos you'd been buying me, so I got a sun inked on my butt and then when it came to your turn you totally chickened out. The next morning you claimed to remember nothing and denied everything, and I couldn't sit down for a week."

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"Tonight, Jensen m'boy, we are going out," Chris announced as he walked through Jensen's front door, heading straight to the fridge to get a beer out. He was pretty much the only reason Jensen kept them in the place anymore, not since he found out he'd lost his license thanks to two DUI's and combined with being drunk when he lost his memory, he had decided to err on the side of caution.

Jensen raised an eyebrow at Chris, kicking the front door behind them. "We are?"

“Technically,” Chris said, popping the cap off the beer, “We’re staying in, but we’ve got to go out to do it, so it still counts.”

“Now I’m really confused,” Jensen said, watching Chris as he waited for some clarification.

“Steve, he’s one of our buddies, is having all the guys over to his place tonight and we’re going to go, catch up with everyone and hang out a little.”

“Are you forgetting the part where I have amnesia?” Jensen couldn’t help but snark. “And don’t know any of these people?”

“Pffft,” Chris said with a wave of his hand. “Half these guys don’t know what day of the week it is, they’re not going to care if you forget their names.”

“And I’m friends with these people?” Jensen asked incredulously.

“Sure you are,” Chris said with a nod, before pushing Jensen towards his room. “And they know you’ve lost your memory, so it’ll be fine.”

“I’m not sure I want to go out,” Jensen protested as Chris maneuvered him through the doorway into his bedroom and started to root through Jensen’s closet.

“I thought you wanted to know about your friends?” Chris asked, throwing a pair of jeans and a well worn, slightly faded tee on to Jensen’s bed.

Jensen slumped down on the bed, picked at the loose thread on the bottom of his UTSA hoodie and huffed, “Between you and Danneel I got the impression I didn’t have any friends.”

Chris stopped what he was he doing, packing up Jensen’s guitar and the spare strings and picks he’d picked up from the store earlier in the week. “Of course you have friends.”

“Then why haven’t they come to see me? Why am I only hearing about them now?”

Chris sighed, “Because the guys we hang out with you were only ever interested in for some drinking, smoking and jamming.”

“Oh,” Jensen said softly. Despite Chris’s protests, he didn’t have any friends other than him, and now Danneel. All he had was this mishmash of people he knew and saw from time to time. It was depressing to think that’s how he’d lived his life. Never connected with these people. “Okay.”

“Look,” Chris said, sitting down next to Jensen and patting his knee. “If you don’t want to go, we don’t have to. I’m not going to pressure you or anything, but they’ve been asking about how you’re doing, I thought you might want to check in with them.”

Jensen ran through his two options in his mind, stay at home and continue to never connect with these people he'd known for god knows how long. Or go out with Chris and run the risk of not getting along with them at all, or worse, finding out more things about himself that he didn't want to know.

Jensen wasn't going to make the same mistakes again. He'd sworn he wasn't, so there was only one thing to do, he had to at least try.

"No, I'm good. Let me shower and change, then we'll go."

Chris beamed, happy and wide, and slapped Jensen on the back before he stood, "I'll leave you to it."

Jensen grunted in agreement as Chris left, pulling the door shut behind him. Jensen took a deep breath in and reminded himself that if he stayed calm then everything would be alright, before standing up and heading for the shower.

As soon as he was dressed Chris hustled him out of his apartment and into the first cab he could hail. He grinned at Jensen and told him to relax.

"You're going to be fine, Jen, I promise."

"I know," Jensen answered though he doubted his voice was doing any job of making Chris think he had any conviction in his statement. It wasn't that he didn't trust Chris to look out for him, because he did, he just didn't know how he was going to face a crowd of people he didn't remember. So far Chris and Danneel had been the only people he had to face and they hadn't even been at the same time.

"You've not done anything fun, or to relax since you got released from the hospital. It's about time we changed that," Chris said and Jensen didn't point out that going to meet a room full of strangers wasn't his idea of a good way to relax. He knew that Chris was trying to help, doing what he thought was the right thing.

"Yeah," Jensen agreed and gave Chris a smile as they pulled up outside a small, two story house painted an obscene mustard yellow with orange trim. The house looked like a bad trip made real, Chris laughed at his reaction.

"Yeah, I know," he said as he paid the driver. "I've been trying to get Steve to paint it since he moved in, but he's determined that he has better things to spend his money on. Secretly I think he kinda likes it."

Jensen pulled a face as they climbed the steps to the front door and Chris hit the buzzer. "Is he damaged in the head or something?"

Chris laughed and elbowed Jensen gently in the gut, "Says amnesia boy!"

Before Jensen could retaliate the door swung open revealing what Jensen instantly knew to be Steve. Bare feet, ratty jeans, messy blonde hair and a suspicious odor about him clicked recognition in Jensen's brain, Steve Carlson. Jensen tried to press for something more as he hugged Chris, but nothing came. Jensen restrained a huff of frustration as Steve turned to him and pulled him into a hug.

"Jenny!" He cried, breathing the smell of whiskey all over Jensen. "Jenny Jen JenJen! It's good to see you man."

"Er," Jensen replied awkwardly, patting Steve on the back. "It's good to see you too."

Steve pulled back and grinned, "You remember me?"

Jensen bit back the urge to say *how could I forget?* and instead smiled politely. "Yeah, I think I do."

"Awesome," Steve crowed before stepping out the doorway, "Come on in, the guys are dying to see you."

Steve led them through the house to a den in the back, where all the drapes were shut and the only light was coming from Die Hard playing on the muted TV and a lamp on the floor in the corner. Five guys sat draped across couches, chairs and bean bags and looking over their faces nothing came to Jensen, not even a spark.

"They're here!" Steve announced as he climbed over a pair of legs and dropped onto a pile of cushions on the floor.

All five guys looked up and smiled at them, Chris made his way around the room, bumping knuckles and making his greetings while Jensen felt like an idiot. Out of place and unsure what to do.

When Chris caught him looking around the room, feet shuffling he waved him over, "Come on, I'll introduce you."

Chris took him around, gave him a brief introduction to each of the people he was supposed to know. Jensen feared he'd been right that this wasn't a good idea. Maybe once he'd gotten along with these people just fine, but the more Chris moved him around the room, the more alien Jensen felt.

This wasn't his world anymore. This wasn't who he was.

Still he had agreed to come and he had promised himself that he would try and he couldn't leave in good conscience after only a few minutes. Mentally agreeing to give them a chance, Jensen let Chris pull him down onto the end of the couch as the other guys laying over it shuffled up to make space.

“Well, I think we should celebrate having Jen back with us,” one of the guys, John maybe, said raising the glass in his hand.

“Yes!” One of the others agreed, while one of the others on the couch said, “Someone get that man a beer!”

Jensen figured one beer wouldn’t hurt, would help him loosen up enough to not feel so awkward around these people, and maybe enjoy himself.

Five beers later and Jensen knew he should be complaining about the joint Steve was rolling to honor him, or something, but he had an easy, calming buzz going on. It didn't take long for the smell to drift over to Jensen once Steve had lit the joint, the smell of tobacco drowned out by the heavy weight of the pot mixed in. Jensen inhaled deeply, figured that combined with the beer it would take some of the edge off his frustration with himself, with his own mind, that was itching away under his skin, reminding him that he couldn’t remember.

Instead it hit him hard, like a smack to the head. The recall was sharp and vivid, the pressure against his forehead from inside his skull enough to make him double over in pain, head in his hands.

"You know, you're not nearly as attractive as you think you are when you're high," Jared said, his voice tight as Jensen finished swaying and wobbling his way through the striptease that seemed like the best idea he’d ever had. Jared was in bed, light on the table beside him and advanced economics textbook resting on his propped up knees.

"Aw, come on, you know you don't mean that,” Jensen purred, dropping himself onto the bed with less grace than he had planned on. Still, he continued, forcing himself into Jared’s line of vision by draping himself all over his boyfriend. “You think I'm a sexy beast all the time."

"Beast, yes, sexy, not so much right now," Jared scowled, trying to shove Jensen off him. “God, you stink. Did you fall in the gutter or something?”

“You saying you don’t love my manly musk?” Jensen tried to lick Jared’s ear, but missed, getting a tongue full of hair and stubble.

“No, I’m saying that the smell of garbage is not one of my turn ons,” Jared snapped, trying again, and failing to push Jensen off of him and back onto his side of the bed.

“Yeah, but I am,” Jensen tried with a grin, hand slipping under the covers to reach for Jared. If he didn’t get in the mood soon then he was going to have to listen to Jensen jerking off, because his hard-on wasn’t going anywhere fast, not when he’d smoked as much pot as he had.

Jared snapped his book shut and glared at Jensen, grabbing his wrist before his hand could make it to the elastic of Jared's boxers. "Jen, dude, I don't care if you have the worst wood in the world right now. While the sex may be great for you when you're high, it's not fun for me, okay? If you can actually get it up in the morning, and you're not an ass about it, I'll think about."

Jensen scowled as Jared shoved his hand away, giving Jensen the look that said there was no negotiating or changing Jared's mind before he rolled over onto his side and flicked the light out.

"You fail at being a red blooded male, you know that right?" Jensen said snidely, feeling both scorned and rejected.

"What ever you say," Jared answered calmly before shifting away from Jensen's hand that just rested at his waist.

Two could play at that game, Jensen decided and slid his hand under the comforter, fingers curling around his cock. If Jared wasn't going to help take care of him, then he'd just have to do it himself. And if he was loud about it and took an extra long time to tease himself to orgasm, so what?

Jensen barely made it out of Steve's den and into the cool, clean air of the bathroom before he threw up. Gagging into the toilet Jensen wished the memories would stop coming back. If this was who he was, then he didn't want to know, didn't want to remember.

*

Jensen stretched out across Danneel's couch, long enough for his feet not to hang off the end as she settled next to him, tucked into the corner of the L shape it formed, her dog Icarus crashed out against Jensen's calf. Danneel's shoulder was cold against the skin of his neck and he teased, "You're freezing, stop being such a cheap skate and put the heat on."

She gave him a playful slap for his lip and pulled the blanket draped over the back of the couch down and around her. "Do you have any idea what that air does to your skin?"

Jensen laughed, "Am I supposed to care?"

"I give up," she huffed playfully switching the TV on. "What'd you want to watch? Reality TV, something educational or a movie where stuff gets blown up…Why am I even asking, you want to watch stuff get blown up, don't you?"

Jensen laughed, loud and light as Danneel pulled the guide up and scrolled through the movie channels, settling on a Lethal Weapon re-run. "You know me so well."

Danneel murmured in agreement as she shuffled around next to him again, until she finally settled and asked, “So how’s the job hunting going?”

Jensen shrugged and hoped she wasn’t looking at him, felt the shame driven flush burn his cheeks. He had started job hunting two weeks after he’d gotten out of hospital, aware that he had practically no money in savings and it wasn’t long until the rent Chris paid for him ran out and he’d have his landlord knocking on his door.

“Not so good,” he eventually confessed as he felt Danneel’s eyes on him, waiting.

“Oh, sweetie,” she sighed. “What are you going to do?”

Jensen shrugged again, this was his problem. “I don’t know.” He’d known that trying to get a job would be hard, with no job history, a patchwork knowledge of current affairs and society and no references. Though from what Chris had told him on that day after his release, having them probably wouldn’t have done him any favors either.

In short, he was unemployable. There were plenty of actresses waiting for their big breaks and desperate students in LA wanting jobs for employers not to give Jensen a look in. Let alone getting in contact with Doctor Kripke to confirm that he wasn’t in possession of a really weird excuse for having a résumé with a ten year gap in it.

“The rent Chris paid for me is going to run out pretty soon and I don’t have enough to cover another month, but I can’t even get interviews, so how I’m supposed to actually get a job is beyond me.”

“Alright, I have an idea,” Danneel started, her tone making it clear that she thought Jensen wasn’t going to like it. Right now, he was pretty much willing to listen to any idea to get him back to honest work, get his life back on track.

“Danni, I’ll pretty much consider anything as long as it’s not illegal or immoral, right now.”

“Move in with me,” she said and Jensen really wasn’t expecting that.

“What?”

“Move in with me,” she repeated, a little softer and calmer as she turned so she could look at Jensen. “Here, it’s not like I haven’t got the space. I don’t know why I got a three bedroom house anyway, it’s not like I ever use the extra rooms.”

“Danni,” Jensen said softly, touched by her offer but he couldn’t. He couldn’t move in when he had no money and no job, rely on her to support him financially as well as all the other ways she helped keep him above water. “It’s a really sweet offer, but you know I can’t.”

“Give me one good reason?” She demanded softly, sounding more put out than offended by his protest.

“How about: I don’t have a job and or know how I’m going to get one.”

Danneel rolled her eyes and tutted, “Which is exactly why you need to move in, before you get an eviction notice slapped on your door and you have no where else to go.” She sighed softly, “Look, I know you don’t want to owe me or anything, but it’s not like having you live here is going to bankrupt me, or even come close.”

“I can’t,” Jensen insisted. It felt too much like taking advantage of her generosity.

“Okay,” she huffed. “If you’re going to insist on being noble, how about we make a deal?”

“A deal?”

“Yeah, I don’t really like Icarus’s new doggy sitter, she smells funky and I swear she’s selling my underwear on ebay or something. So you be Icarus’ new dog sitter during the day, do everything that Kylie does and maybe some chores to pay your way. And after a couple of weeks I’ll write you a reference to help you get a real job.”

“Are you serious?” Jensen asked, even though he knew that she was. He just struggled to get his head around the idea that she would do that, for him.

“If you’re going to insist on not letting me help you out the goodness of my own heart, help me solve two problems while keeping your stupid manly pride.”

“Two problems?”

“Looking for a new sitter for Icarus and worrying about you having to chose between starving or ending up on the street,” she explained with a shrug.

Jensen smiled softly, grateful. “Okay, I guess that could work.”

Danneel squealed happily and Jensen couldn’t help but laugh, if there was anyone he wanted to live with right now, it was her, and once he was actually able to pay for rent and groceries, it would be even better.

“This is so awesome,” she beamed standing up. “I think we can allow ourselves one glass of wine to celebrate, huh?”

Jensen nodded slowly, knew she wouldn’t let him end up drinking more.

“What do you think of Chris?” Jensen asked when Danneel returned and handed him a

glass of red wine. He knew Chris wouldn't approve of Jensen moving in with Danneel, would tell him what a bad idea it was for both of them. After the night before, Jensen wasn't sure if he should even be trusting Chris' judgment.

Danneel pulled a face briefly, tried to hide it but wasn't quick enough and he couldn't help but laugh.

"Shit," Danneel cursed hiding her head in her hands.

"Now you have to answer," Jensen told her as she finally re-emerged from hiding, pink flush fading from her cheeks.

"Okay," she agreed. "I think that he'd be a really nice guy if he had someone to kick him into line."

"And without someone to kick him into line," Jensen prompted.

Danneel tilted her head and studied Jensen before asking, "What happened?"

"What do you mean?"

She laughed, "Don't give me that look, I'm not an idiot. What happened that's suddenly got you wondering about my opinion of Chris, which, by the way, is your way of trying to get yours validated."

"I'm going to ignore that last bit," Jensen grumbled, crossing his arms over his chest.

"Then let's focus on what the little moron has done," she said with a teasing grin and Jensen couldn't help but laugh for a moment, before he had to get serious.

"He came 'round yesterday and took me out."

Danneel groaned, "Don't tell me he took you out to meet the guys?" When Jensen nodded in agreement her face turned angry, "I told the little shit not to."

Jensen exhaled, confessed, "I wish he'd listen to you."

All the anger dropped out of Danneel's face and she wrapped her arm around his shoulder and hugged him tight. "Oh sweetie."

"I mean," Jensen continued, leaning into her, "Chris gave me the whole – you kinda suck – speech when I got out of the hospital, but I guess it didn't prepare me for that. I'm thirty, shouldn't I have grown out of getting drunk and high all the time by now?"

Danneel shrugged, "I don't think some people ever grow out it….and I think most the people you know are them."

“Even Chris?”

Danneel shook her head, “I think he’ll settled down one day, he’s too much of a good southern family man not to…but until then I don’t think things will change.”

“I’m not that guy anymore…I don’t want to be.”

“It’s okay to be afraid, might even be a good thing,” Danneel assured, pressing a kiss to his temple. “You do what you have to, Chris cares about you, he’ll understand.”

*

Even though Jensen had been expecting Chris for half an hour, ever since he called to let him know that he was on his way over, he still jumped when there was a knock on the door and then Chris let himself in. Jensen swallowed hard as he looked over the back of the couch at Chris and greeted him with, “There’s beer in the fridge if you want.”

“Cool, thanks,” Chris said as he went to pull one out. “You want?” He offered and Jensen shook his head. Chris shrugged, kicked the fridge closed and popped the cap off his beer before heading over to sit in the chair opposite Jensen.

“I was thinking, maybe you’d be up to a little jamming session tonight, you, me, Steve, a couple of the guys you met the other night.”

Jensen took a deep breath and shook his head, this was what he knew he had to do, but really didn’t want to. “No, I don’t think that’s a good idea.”

“Why not?” Chris asked, forehead crinkling in confusion. “I know you got sick last time we were there, but I thought you ate something bad.”

Jensen sighed deeply, looked down at the dirty brown carpet for a long moment before telling Chris what actually happened that night. “It wasn’t bad food. When Steve lit up, I remembered something.”

“Well, I’ll leap to the conclusion that it wasn’t a good one, then.” Chris said before taking a long pull of his beer.

Jensen shook his head, “Not much of a surprise, I know, but no, it wasn’t a good one.”

Chris tilted his head and studied Jensen for a long moment. The intensity of Chris’s stare made Jensen shift uncomfortably on the couch until he finally broke, “What?”

“I thought things were getting better, or at least, you were getting better and handling the not so nice stuff your memory’s been throwing back at you.”

“I am,” Jensen assured, “I mean I was… What I remembered, it made me realize something.”

“You say that like I’m not going to like it,” Chris chuckled and Jensen couldn’t’ help but wonder if he knew it because he was like the old him or because Chris had learnt the new him as well. Jensen hoped to god it was the latter. He wasn’t that guy. Being that guy had driven Jared away and Jensen was never going to be that stupid again.

“You’re not,” Jensen said, taking a deep breath. He had to say it and it was now or never before he turned chicken shit. “I think that I need to take a step back, from our friendship.”

Chris continued to look at Jensen, taking another pull of his beer before he finally spoke, infinitely calmer than Jensen was expecting. “And this is because of the other night?”

Jensen nodded slowly, “Yeah…It made me realize, that’s what our friendship was about, wasn’t it? Drinking and drugs and sex.”

Chris laughed and Jensen was shocked as he agreed, “Yeah, that pretty much sums it up.”

Jensen was expecting an explosion of temper, for Chris to point out everything he’d done for Jensen since he was admitted to hospital. Not to be so calm and…understanding. “I…,” Jensen started, but couldn’t finish, didn’t know what to say.

Chris finished off his beer with a smirk before he stood and crossed over to Jensen, hand out to tug him up. Once Jensen was on his feet Chris pulled Jensen to him and held him in a tight bear hug, crushing the air out of his lungs. “It’s okay,” Chris said into his neck and Jensen clung back just as hard.

He couldn’t believe that Chris was okay with this, that he understood. He didn’t realize how much he hadn’t wanted to hurt Chris until he almost had. Maybe he had gotten more attached to him than he had meant to, had wanted too when he first woke up. The sharp stab of regret over losing him somewhere between his stomach and his ribs let him know that they really had been friends. Before and after.

“I’m sorry,” Jensen said softly, tried to hold on a little longer as Chris pulled away and took a step back. “I don’t,” Jensen started but Chris cut him off with a knowing smile.

“And I said its okay, I get it.”

“You do?” Jensen asked, hopefully. Wanted Chris to know that he really didn’t want to do this, but he had to.

Chris nodded, “Now don’t think this is me taking responsibility for some of the spectacularly shitty choices you’ve made over the last ten years, but maybe I’ve not helped as much as I should have.”

“Chris, don’t,” Jensen tried again, but Chris just leveled him with a firm glare and Jensen shut his mouth and let him finish.

“Somewhere along the line you forgot how to stop, how to say no and be sensible. I ain’t saying I’m good at it myself, but you were worse and I stood by and let you because I thought it wasn’t a problem. By the time I realized you were unhappy as hell I didn’t think there was much hope at you changing, so I learnt to love you like you were.”

“Even though I was an ass?” Jensen teased with a wry smile, already knew the answer. The evidence was standing in front of him, after all.

Chris chuckled, “Even though you were an ass.”

“You understand?”

Chris nodded, “Yeah, I understand. I like my life the way it is, working my way from gig to gig, drinking and getting laid, but that ain’t for you. And you got seduced by all that crap once and you don’t want it to happen again.”

Jensen sighed, “The more I remember the more I hate myself. The things I did, the way I acted, it was all wrong and…you’re right. I don’t want it to happen again, I wasn’t happy.”

“Maybe if I’d-,” Chris started, but this time Jensen stopped, slugging him in the arm.

“Don’t you even think it, Christian Kane. My mistakes are my own, even if I didn’t take responsibility for them at the time,” Jensen told him firmly.

“You know, I’m gonna miss waking up to your face drooling all over my couch,” Chris said, breaking into a grin, eyes sparkling.

Jensen laughed, long and loud and Chris joined him until they were wiping tears out the corner of their eyes.

“This doesn’t have to be forever you know, I just need some time to get back on my feet…work out who the hell I am and what I’m doing.”

“I know,” Chris said and smiled softly, “You call me if you need anything. Anything, you hear me.”

Jensen nodded and pulled Chris in for another hug, said tenderly in his ear, “Thank you, Chris, for everything.”

“Not a problem Jen, not a problem.”

Big Bang 2009 || Part Five

The house loomed in front of Jensen, menacing in its picture-perfect detail and the knowledge that every time Jensen had been here before it had caused trouble and anger and hurt. Danneel squeezed his hand, supportive even though she didn't agree that this was a good idea when he told her about visiting Jared's house before, that he needed to set things right. Danneel has said that while she may not agree, nothing could stop her from going with him, that no matter what she would respect and support his choices.

Jensen didn't care what she thought, not when it came to Jared at least. Jensen knew there were still massive gaps in his memory, holes that he was no longer sure he wanted to fill. Not knowing what a bastard he'd been to Jared, to everyone. Even if he didn't remember everything that he'd done, he couldn't walk away and act like nothing had changed when it had.

Everything had changed for Jensen and he needed Jared to know. He needed him to understand that he wasn't *that* Jensen anymore and that he didn't want to be him again. He had loved Jared, he still did, and his words ringing angry in his ears still kept him awake at night.

Jensen didn't want Jared to think that he had gone there to cause trouble, to hurt anyone. Jensen wasn't sure how he was supposed to go on without Jared in his life, but having Jared hate him would be too much.

As much as he told himself that there was no chance, that even if Jared did accept the new him, forgive his old failures, he wouldn't want him back, Jensen couldn't help but hope. That if he could make Jared understand, then maybe there would be a chance for him. For them.

"You don't have to do this, you know," Danneel said softly, interrupting Jensen's thoughts. The hope of reconciliation he was trying to keep pressed deep down inside him, where it couldn't hurt if it failed, was attempting to burst free.

Jensen swallowed hard and shook his head, "No, I do…I need to."

Danneel watched Jensen for a moment, making him want to squirm under the weight of her gaze as she bit her bottom lip and her fingers curled warm around his wrist. "Alright, come on then," She said, leading him along the path that wound through the perfectly mowed grass, up the steeps and onto the porch.

As they stopped in front of the door, Danneel's hand dropped from Jensen's waist, took his hand again and squeezed. In that moment Jensen didn't think he could love her more than he did, just for standing there, holding his hand in support even though she thought he was making a mistake, was going to get himself hurt.

Jensen knew he didn't deserve her, or this, not after everything but thanked God that he did. Knew he couldn't do this without her.

He gave her a soft smile, full of adoration and let her fuss over him with her free hand. She adjusted his glasses and ruffled his hair, doing what he now knew to be her way of coping with nerves and stress. Mothering.

"You look fine." She told him before he could even ask, fixed his shirt collar as she told him so. "You want me to knock?"

Jensen shook his head, had to do this himself. How was he supposed to talk to Jared, try to explain everything that had happened, that had changed, if he couldn't even knock on the door. The fear of Jared's reaction threatened to cripple him, Jensen didn't know if he could face Jared's anger again, the possibility that he might not hear him out and even if he did, that he might not care.

"I got it." Jensen assured, took a deep breath, kissed Danneel's knuckles then knocked the door, three solid bangs against the hard, dark wood.

Danneel squeezed his hand again, smiled nervously at him and he knew she could hear movement inside the house, just like he did. A couple of dogs barks and the sounds of scrabbling claws and excited animals drew closer and Jensen's heart raced, blood thumping loud inside his ears.

"You can do this." Danneel assured softly, in his ear in the moment before the door clicked and it drew open revealing Jared.

For a moment, Jensen was dumb struck at the sight on him.

Jared seemed to feel the same, but snapped out of it quickly, the look of shock on his face morphing quickly into anger, door already closing as he hissed. "I'm not having this conversation with you again, Jensen."

"Wait," Jensen said, hardly recognizing his own voice, high pitched and afraid mixed in with Danneel's as she said the same.

Jared paused for a moment, studied Jensen and Danneel through narrow and suspicious eyes. "No," he said finally, firmly.

"Please, Jay," Jensen pleaded stepping forward, didn't care that he was begging, would get down on his hands and knees if Jared would just give him a chance to explain, to say sorry, to try and find out why.

"Jen," Danneel intervened, hand on Jensen's chest stopping him from getting any closer to Jared, slipped in front of him instead, spoke to Jared soft and sweet, with all the innocence and charm she had.

“Jared, please-” Danneel started, but Jared interrupted, voice sharp and cold.

“Who are you?”

“My name’s Danneel, I’m a friend of Jensen’s,” She explained, guiding Jensen back at little to give her and Jared some space. Jensen couldn’t watch, looked at his shoes instead, studied the way the fabric over his right big toe was worn so thin he could see the color of his socks through it. He tried not to listen to Danneel working to convince Jared to just let Jensen speak to him. Jensen knew it wasn’t going to be easy, but it was embarrassing to need Danneel to mediate between them, just to try and get Jensen a chance.

“I know you’re angry at him and you’re probably right to be suspicious of why he’s here, but I promise you, he’s not here to cause trouble,” she said so earnestly Jensen swallowed, felt his Adams apple tremble around it as she continued. “He just wants to talk to you and…you really need to hear what he has to say.”

“Why should I?” Jared asked, his tone annoyed to match his sigh. Jensen didn’t need to look at him to know how he stood, arms crossed tightly over his chest, weight all on his right foot, left hip jutting out, all bone under his baggy jeans.

“Because things change, people change,” Danneel said softly and Jensen looked up to see her shrugging her shoulders, but Jared’s eyes on him over her shoulder, wide and confused, a frown creasing his forehead.

The look was gone as soon as Jared caught that he was being watched, their eyes met and Jared’s face went cold. “Since when did you let other people do your dirty work?”

“I’m not who you think I am Jared and she’s not here for anything other than moral support,” At that Jared snorted, looked away with disbelief written all over his face. Jensen continued, “I wanted to say that I’m sorry.”

That got Jared’s attention, head snapping around to look at Jensen, eyes intense but still suspicious and icy, not how Jensen ever knew him. He hated himself for turning Jared into this. “You? Sorry?” He spat, “Is this another one of your sick jokes?”

Jensen looked at the floor, took a deep breath, he’d known this was going to hard and it was going to hurt, he just didn’t realize how much. “I know you’re not going to invite me, and I don’t expect you to,” Jensen rushed, before Jared could snap out anything else. “But, can we just sit? So we can talk.

“Please, Jared, I’m not jerking you around…something happened and I need you to listen, please.”

“What have you given me?” Jared asked, whole body drawn up and aggressive as he

stepped out the house, closing the door behind him, looming over Jensen in way he'd never done when they were together.

"Nothing," Jensen stuttered, hands coming up in defense as he realized he didn't know Jared anymore, didn't know his limits or what he might do, what he was capable of.

"For Christ's sake, stop being such a self-righteous dick for two second and listen to what he has to say. Just because you think something doesn't make it so." Danneel snapped and Jensen could see the fury in her flushed cheeks and tense shoulders as she pushed Jared back, her hands tiny against his chest.

Danneel looked over her shoulder to Jensen, but he couldn't say anything, all the fight drained out of him. This wasn't the Jared he knew and to make it worse, he hated Jensen, couldn't even stand to look at him and Jensen didn't even know why he was here anymore. Why he was trying. He'd lost everything.

"Oh no you don't," Danneel growled softly at Jensen, before turning back to Jared and announcing. "Jensen has amnesia. That day he came to your house it was because he didn't know what had happened between you."

Jared snorted, "Amnesia, you really think I'm going to fall for that? Just 'cause he acts like…" Jared swallowed, wavered. "Like he used to, doesn't mean he's not faking it."

"I woke up in hospital 3 months ago, I thought I was in Texas and the last thing I remembered was falling asleep with you," Jensen said, unsure if his voice would hold. Couldn't look at Jared, focused on the two deck chairs sat at the other end of the porch instead, but he had to say it, explain what had happened to him. "I…I thought we'd just spent the Valentines of '98 at a party at Mikes, when we'd come home and… and then it was November 1st." Jensen swallowed again, willed the dampness in his eyes to go, couldn't, wouldn't break in front of Jared. "God, Jay, the only thing I wanted was you and there was this guy I didn't even know telling me he was my friend and that I'd lost you…that I'd driven you away and I didn't want to believe it. That's why I came."

"This isn't you," Jared said, voice shaking and Jensen had to take a step back, put more space between them because he wanted nothing more than to reach out and hold Jared, take his pain away. "This hasn't been you for…for years."

"I lost ten years Jared…I'm not," Jensen sighed in frustration, looked heavenward to try and find the right words. "I'm not him anymore. I don't know who I am."

"I don't believe it," Jared whispered and Jensen could hear in every note of his voice that his resolve was breaking, that the real Jared was coming out from behind the harsh and angry front he'd been protecting himself with. "I don't…you can't."

Jensen looked at him and felt his heart break all over again. This is what he'd done to Jared, left him slouched down and broken, like the little boy who stood on Jensen's

doorstep and told him his hamster had died. All he wanted to do was put it right, stop Jared from hurting and hating him, and he couldn't even do that right.

"I should go…" Jensen said, "I just wanted to say I'm sorry. I…I don't remember everything, but…I remember enough to know that I treated you badly…too badly. I don't know why I did those things, acted that way and I wish I could take it back…I just need you to know that. And…and that I loved you back then. I still do."

"Jensen," Jared said, choked, reaching out for him but Jensen stepped out of reach. Didn't think he could stand just to be touched by Jared and nothing more.

"My neurologist is Doctor Kripke, he's at Cedar Sinai, he won't give you details but he'll confirm I'm a patient. If that's not enough, I have group therapy meetings every Thursday night, at eight, you can find me there."

"You're really serious, aren't you?" Jared asked, like this being true was worse than Jensen lying, than being the old him and just trying to screw with his head again.

"Yeah, I'm being serious…," Jensen said, nodding somberly. "I know that I can't…I can't make up for all the things I've done to you, the ways I've hurt you…but. I want to remember, I need to remember because I don't want to be that guy. And I know that you probably don't want me anywhere near you, but I can't stand the thought of not having you in my life," Jensen confessed, voice cracking a little, "you've always been there and I don't want to lose you. Just, please, think about it."

Jared opened his mouth, but nothing came out, so Jensen smiled sadly in response, said: "Bye, Jay." Before letting Danneel lead him away, her arm a warm and comforting weight around his waist.

*

Jensen stared down at the letter in his hands and wondered if he was hallucinating, because there was no way in hell it could be real. After a long moment to compose himself, and attempting to croak out Danneel's name, he finally found his voice.

"Danni!" He hollered at the top of his lungs, heard a thump from above him before the sound of her feet thundered down the stairs.

"Jensen?" She called out in response, voice panicked and Jensen was still to shell shocked to do anything but call her again, letting her find him by his voice.

"Jensen, what's wrong? What happened?" Danneel panted as she came to a halt in front of him, cheeks flushed as she gripped the tops of his arms and looked him up and down.

"I…I…" Jensen attempted to stutter out and when he failed to find any words suitable to explain what was going on inside his head, he held out the letter to her.

“You’re freaking me out,” she said as she took the letter, her hand shaking almost as much as his as she held it.

“This has to be a joke, right?” Jensen managed, as Danneel bit her bottom lip and hurried through the contents of the letter, muttering it under her breath.

“Dear Jensen Ackles, we are pleased to contact your regarding your blog, *all my anecdotes are out of date.* Since it’s creation in early December it has become popular with many of our staff and we feel that the your discussion of coming to terms with daily life and current events as an amnesia patient would be a exciting addition to the columnists we currently feature. You will find our employment offer to be most generous, to discuss the details please contact yadda yadda yadda, regards, Russ Stanton, Editor LA Times dot com.”

Danneel paused for a long moment, her gaze flicking up and down between Jensen and the letter, getting wider by each moment until it seemed to sink in for her. Then she squealed, loud and high pitched as she jumped up and down for a moment before wrapping Jensen in a crushing, but energetic hug.

“Oh my god,” she squeaked and he’d never seen her this excited. “Jensen, the LA Times is offering you a job. They want you to write for them! The LA Times!”

Jensen just clung to her, still dumbfounded. He’d started the blog as somewhere to vent, to try and organize his thoughts on how the world had changed and just how weird, and hard, it was to be him most days. Somewhere in the back of his mind he had been aware that other people were reading it, though he had never known it was *popular*, never something he had actively thought about. He didn’t want to.

When Jensen had first started writing the blog, after a couple of posts he had started to get comments appearing in his inbox. People were reading, were trying to talk to him and he hadn’t been interested in interacting with the outside world. Didn’t want to the pity and sympathy of people he didn’t know, especially as he didn’t deserve it.

It had never been about entertaining people, though if the letter was to be believed, apparently he had been.

“I…That can’t be real,” Jensen spluttered. It was stupid, why would the LA Times want him? Why would they even be reading his stupid blog to begin with, and on the outside chance they were, why would they want him? There was nothing special about his writing, about his blog. It was just him rambling when he wanted to vent and hear nothing in return.

Danneel pulled back, cupped Jensen’s face in her hands, the letter crushed against his neck. “It’s real,” she said, beaming at him like a proud momma.

Jensen started to shake his head, to disagree because it couldn't be real, but Danneel stopped him and her smile softened, turned more loving. "Jensen, you just got head hunted by the LA Times. This is real."

"Why would they want me?" Jensen asked softly, still trying to process the news. The LA Times wanted him? A jobless loser caught between the past he remembered, the past he wasn't sure he wanted to remember and a confused future.

Danneel smirked and took a step back, dropping one hand to Jensen's waist and smoothing his hair with the other. "Because you're amazing, sweetie, that's why."

Jensen felt his cheeks flush hot and red, opened his mouth to protest because the last few months had proved he was anything but amazing.

"Don't," Danneel cut him off. "I get that you've not been feeling very *yay you* since this started but you're not giving yourself enough credit. Your writing is good, it's sharp and funny and touching and it's real."

"How do you know that?" Jensen frowned, pulling back from Danneel. How did she know what his writing was like? He had never told her about the blog.

"A friend of mine forwarded me a link to it," She explained, curling her arm around his waist and leading him over to the couch to sit down. "Telling me how I really should be reading this awesome blog, because it'd really put things in perspective for me. And it was you."

"Me?" Jensen frowned, she had to be messing with him…He had screwed everything up, flunked out of college and lost his memory. He didn't have anything going for him, all he had was trying not to end up being *him* again.

Danneel nodded and leaned close, pressed a kiss to his temple, "All you, baby…You need to believe in yourself more."

"How am I supposed to, you know who I am…"

Danneel sighed deeply and pulled him close, resting her head in the crook of his neck and snuggling into his side. "Amnesia isn't a valid excuse for being an idiot, you know."

"What?" Jensen started, trying to look down at her, but she held fast and kept him close.

"I know you're afraid, Jensen, of ending up like you were…before the accident, but that alone sets you apart from him. That you care about becoming that sort of person again."

"You make it sound like we're different people."

"You are, even if you do share the same body," Danneel said and when Jensen snorted,

she just ignored him and carried on.

“If anyone is qualified to say this, then it’s me. You are not him, not even close, and so what if you were him for a while, you’re not anymore. You’re the man who’s sat in front of me right now, who is trying to put his life back together and get a job, who writes like a pro and the LA Times wants to employ.”

“Danni,” Jensen whispered into her hair as he wrapped his arms around her and clung on tight. Felt so much love and affection for her, for how she made him just stop and think until he made sense of things.

Danneel tilted her head up and kissed his cheek, “I know. You’re welcome.”

*

When Jensen came out of his Thursday evening group therapy session he was prepared for a wait, they had finished early and the caretaker support session Danneel attended at the same time always let out late. What he wasn’t expecting was Jared.

Jensen blinked, once, twice, three times and felt like an owl as he stared across the hospital corridor at where Jared stood. His shoulders were slumped, hands wedged deep in his jeans pockets and gaze fixed firmly on the floor and his shuffling feet. For someone so huge, Jared looked practically tiny.

Every promise Jensen had made himself since he had been to Jared’s house to apologize had hinged on Jensen’s belief that Jared wouldn’t do this. That he wouldn’t show up in Jensen’s life again, because there was no hope for them, because all he did was hurt Jared, even when he didn’t mean or want to. Jensen had built his resolve by telling himself that Jared didn’t want him in his life, that by staying away he would not just be doing what was best for Jared, but what he wanted.

Yet there he was outside his group therapy room, waiting for Jensen. He didn’t know whether to laugh or cry. Jensen knew that he should send Jared away, continue his resolve to stay out of Jared’s life and just let him be happy, stop hurting him.

Jensen tried to force his feet to move, make himself step away from where Jared stood still studying the floor tiles and go to Danneel’s room, drag her out and make her take him home and away from Jared. Away from the temptation to try and ask him what he wanted, why he was there, beg him just to give him one more chance, let him prove that things were different, would always be different. Better.

Jensen took a deep breath, reminded himself that this wasn’t Jared, the man who looked like a scared little boy. This was what Jensen had done to him and that’s why he had to walk away. Was going to walk away.

Then Jared looked up, met Jensen’s eyes with a weak and nervous smile. Jensen was

powerless to walk away.

“Hi,” Jared said softly, pulling one hand out of his pocket to give Jensen a small and awkward wave. “I wasn’t sure you’d be here.”

“I come every week,” Jensen said, not meaning too. He didn’t want Jared turning up and catching him off guard again, not when he wasn’t prepared to see him. Not when he was supposed to be staying away, for the sake of them both.

“Does it help?” Jared asked, looking past Jensen shoulder into the room behind him, where the chairs were in a small circle, yoga mats in a heap on the floor at the back.

Jensen nodded, it did help in a way, being with people who understood his frustrations, who knew what it was like to feel like his own body, own mind, had failed him. “Yeah,” Jensen began, ready to try and explain to Jared, but caught himself before he could get going, get comfortable talking to him. “What are you doing here?”

“You said I should come,” Jared said, voice hesitant. “That if I…If I didn’t believe you I should come and see you here.”

Of course Jared didn’t believe Jensen, not after all the lies he’d told, all the tricks he’d pulled. Why not fake amnesia to screw with him some more. Jensen swallowed, forced the nausea and bile rising into the back of his throat back down. He couldn’t change that he’d once been someone capable of that, all he could do was change who he was now.

“Are you okay?” Jared asked, hand reaching out for Jensen’s arm but he stopped halfway, hovering mid air for a moment before he pulled it back, wedged it down deep in his pocket again.

“Yeah,” Jensen croaked out, throat suddenly dry. “It just…takes a lot of getting used to.”

“I can’t imagine what it’s like, not having your memory.”

“No,” Jensen confessed, rubbing at the back of his neck. “Getting used to the fact that you used to be the kind of person that would fake amnesia.”

Jared seemed to think about how to respond, biting his bottom lip for a long moment before asking, almost shyly: “You want to, um, get out of here? Talk somewhere more private?”

“No,” Jensen answered, mouth shooting off in shock before he could actually form a decent sentence. “I mean, yes, but I have to wait for Danneel.”

“Danneel?” Jared questioned and Jensen hated that he couldn’t read the look in his eyes anymore, couldn’t tell just from a look what he was thinking. “The girl you were with when you came to the house?”

Jensen nodded, “Yeah. She’s a friend.”

“Is she giving you a ride, because I could-?“ Jared started but Jensen cut him off with another nod, unsure how to handle the situation. Explain him and Danneel when he didn’t know how he felt, if he even should be talking to Jared about this.

Just like Jensen was powerless to walk away, Jensen had to answer Jared, had to at least try and explain because he wanted to know. Pleaded with the puppy dog eyes that Jensen had never been able to resist. “They run a support session at the same time as mine, for family members, friends, caretakers, pretty much anyone that has to deal with us.”

“Us?” Jared asked, the little furrow between his eyebrows that Jensen had always found adorable, wanted to kiss away, appeared with his frown.

“People that have lost their memory,” Jensen explained softly. “Danneel goes; she’ll come get me when they’re done.”

“Are you and her…?” Jared questioned, looking back down at the ground and letting his hair hide any chance Jensen might have had of seeing his face, trying to understand the slightly tense tone of his voice.

“It’s complicated,” Jensen replied, grimacing at himself and how clichéd he sounded, but it was true.

Danneel and his relationship couldn’t be summed up in a yes or no answer, especially not to Jared of all people. Jensen wasn’t even sure that he wanted Jared to know, not when Danneel had been someone to take his mind off Jared, had instead become his best friend, the person who took care of him regardless of his faults. Someone who loved him pretty much unconditionally and Jensen didn’t just want to protect Jared from that, but didn’t want to share it with anyone.

“I suppose it would be a total no-no to ask if you remember what you used to say about people using ‘complicated’ as an answer?” Jared asked with a hint of a smirk, nothing more than a glint in his eyes under his hair and a curve at the corner of his lips.

“No,” Jensen laughed softly, “That much I can remember.” He was sixteen, long before his memory cut out and it was when Jared rejected him. Not something he could forget, even if he wanted to.

“Jay, people only ever say something is complicated for two reasons. One, they think you’re too stupid to understand what they’re talking about, or two, they know you’re not going to like or agree with what they’re saying so don’t want to tell you.”

“Jen-” Jared sighed, scuffed the dirt of the deserted ball field under his feet.

*“Come on, man…You can’t keep me hanging like this,” Jensen said in the sharpest voice he’d ever used on Jared since he used to melt Jensen’s army soldiers in his back yard when they were nine. Grabbed Jared’s arm and turned him to face him, Jared’s last growth spurt still new enough that Jensen kept forgetting that now Jared looked down on him. “**You** kissed me. It’s not that weird for me to want to know how you feel about me because of it!”*

“I know I! I know I did! And it totally would have been easier if you’d just given me a black eye like I thought you would,” Jared exclaimed with an annoyed huff, pulling out of Jensen’s grip easily.

“You’re giving out some seriously mixed signals,” Jensen sighed, rubbing the back of his neck in frustration.

“I’m sorry,” Jared said softly, still wouldn’t meet Jensen’s eyes and he didn’t really need to say anymore. They’d perfected the art of speaking without words when they were still playing in the sandpit in the back of Jared’s yard and Jensen got the message loud and clear.

Mistake.

Jensen swallowed, looked down at his sneakers and took a deep breath. He wanted to hate Jared for this, for kissing him and making him think that maybe he wasn’t imagining that there was something between them. That he wasn’t the only one that was really fucking confused about what he was feeling and how suddenly he didn’t want a house, a wife and a couple of kids. Just wanted them instead.

“I get it,” Jensen said softly, stepping backwards, ready to break out into a run. Hoped that just maybe Jared wouldn’t be able to catch up with him if he got enough of a head start.

“No, you don’t,” Jared said following Jensen, stepping close enough to curl his fingers around Jensen’s arms. Barely any pressure, no threat, but still more than enough to hold Jensen there just because it was Jared. “I told you it was complicated.”

“What’s so complicated about it Jared? You either…have feelings for me that go way beyond best buddies, or you don’t.”

“You know it’s not that simple,” Jared growled and Jensen couldn’t help the shiver of desire it sent up his spine.

“Say it Jared,” Jensen pleaded softly. Needed to know what was holding Jared back so he could tell him exactly how stupid it was.

“I don’t want to have feelings for you, Jensen. You’re my best friend and that should be

it. I don't want to be gay. I don't want to have a boyfriend. I want to be able to tell my parents about my dates, only sneak around when I've broken curfew. I just want us to be friends."

"Then why did you kiss me?"

"Because I didn't think you'd kiss me back! Because I thought I wouldn't like it and then I could forget about this…I told you it was complicated."

"It's not complicated Jared, you're a coward," Jensen said calmly. Ignored Jared saying his name as he walked away.

"So is it that you think I'm too stupid or I won't like what you have to say?" Jared asked, arms crossed over his chest.

"I don't think you're stupid, I never have," Jensen answered instantly and honestly. "Complicated for once is just that, complicated, and not for here."

"You love her?" Jared asked, barely more than a breath as he started shuffling again. It made Jensen's heart stop to realize that his answer actually mattered to Jared, that maybe he didn't want him to love Danneel.

Despite the hope, despite not wanting to let it go Jensen wasn't going to lie. Not anymore. "Yes I love her, how could I not? I don't think I could have gotten this far without her. Doesn't mean I'm *in* love with her."

"Good thing I knew that already or you might have broken my heart," Danneel's voice, laughing and light cut in before Jared could speak, mouth open as her arm draped over Jensen's shoulders and planted a quick kiss on his cheek. "Blowing me off?" She asked, seemingly un-phased by Jared's presence, but Jensen now knew her better than that.

"I just wanted to talk to Jensen, after earlier this week," Jared explained tentatively. "But if you have plans, I could come back another time."

Danneel looked at Jensen, letting him decide her response. Jensen wished she would just drag him away, force him to keep to his word instead of being weak and nodding to her. Instead of walking away like he swore he would, he lets Danneel assure Jared and excuse herself.

"No, it's nothing that can't wait. Jensen, you call me if you need anything alright?" She said, giving Jensen a brief but firm hug before heading down the corridor before Jared could protest, the sound of her flip-flops against the linoleum the only sound until she turned the corner and was gone.

"So?" Jensen asked, unable to take the silence any longer and Jared smiled back at him,

small and shy, and he seemed just as unsure as Jensen. “There’s a coffee place a couple of blocks away, it’ll still be open, me and Danneel normally swing by after we’re done here.”

“Okay,” Jared agreed, started walking slowly towards the elevators, “Coffee sounds good.”

They waited together, side by side in silence as they arrived at the elevator.

“Please tell me this is just as weird for you as it is for me,” Jared said breaking the tense silence between them as the elevator pinged for the lower level parking garage.

Jensen laughed with not much humor, “You really have no idea.”

Jared looked guilty as they stepped out the elevator, head hanging a little as he lead the way through the lines of cars. “That was a jack-ass thing for me to say, wasn’t it?”

“Kinda.” Jensen shrugged, even though Jared wouldn’t be able to see it, walked behind him slowly enough to keep a safe distance. “But it’s okay.”

The frown and forehead crinkles were back as Jared stopped, turned to look at Jensen and say with more feeling than he was expecting, “No it’s not...I guess, I just don’t know what to say.”

“Then why did you want to speak to me?” Jensen asked, stopping opposite Jared, the sound of traffic around them little more than a low rumble.

“Because you were my best friend, Jen,” Jared said, hands slowly starting to speak with him, beginning to look like the Jared he remembered, settled in his skin. “Since before I can remember and then you stood there on my doorstep, looking and acting like you. The old you. I’ve spent the last three years trying to forget you, forget what you mean to me because of how you’d changed…I just had to know if it was real.”

“What happens when you know it is?” Jensen forced himself to ask, throat suddenly dry and voice hoarse, afraid of Jared’s answer. Though he didn’t know what he was hoping for, not anymore. Not since Jared came to find him.

“I don’t know,” Jared said, sad and soft, making the inside of Jensen’s chest ache. He didn’t want this for Jared, but then he confessed: “I miss you, the old you…my best friend.” And Jensen was floundering in emotion, unsure of himself and what to feel or do.

“I don’t know if this is a good idea,” Jensen eventually said, with a burst of courage and determination he didn’t think he had. As his head cleared and his heart rate started to calm he knew it was a bad idea, not when Jensen was still trying to get over their break up. Still loved Jared like he did ten years ago, before he drove him away and before Jared hated him and turned into the man in front of him.

“What?” Jared exclaimed, hands flailing for a moment as he paced in a small circle twice next to the dark blue Prius they were standing next to. “You came to me.”

“I know I did, and it was selfish of me,” Jensen admitted. “I thought…,” Jensen sighed, “It doesn’t matter what I thought.”

“Please, Jensen, I just want to understand what happened to you,” Jared pleaded softly and Jensen knew instantly that he was going to cave. That he still couldn’t say no to Jared, especially not when he used that voice. “We don’t have to talk about anything you don’t want to.”

“You’re supposed to hate me, Jay,” Jensen laughed, bitter at himself for what he’d done. “Not be supportive.”

“It’s…” Jared trailed off, hand waving in frustration.

“Complicated?” Jensen finished, with a small smirk.

Jared smiled a little in return, hands dropping to his sides. “Difficult for me to explain, I just…Just because I left, it doesn’t mean I didn’t care about you. That I don’t still care about you.”

“Jared,” Jensen said softly around the lump in his throat. He didn’t want to know that Jared still cared about him, couldn’t cope with the knowledge when he was still such a mess over everything that had happened.

“Let’s not do this here,” Jared said, hand motioning to the parking garage around them, before leading Jensen through more cars. Jensen stayed silent, mind racing, trying to work out what he should do, until they reached Jared’s car and the blip of the alarm snapped Jensen back to reality.

“I think you should take me home,” Jensen suggested, only it wasn’t so much a suggestion as a request as he climbed into the passenger seat of Jared’s SUV.

“Why?” Jared asked, yanking his door open and sticking his head in first so he could hear Jensen’s answer as he climbed into the car properly.

Jensen laughed mirthlessly, “Because this is going to end badly, definitely for me and probably for you too. Neither of us needs that.”

“You don’t know what I need,” Jared said calmly as he shut his door, his voice cold enough make Jensen regret his words, even though he knew he was right.

“No, I don’t,” Jensen agreed, as much as that truth pained him. “But I don’t want to hurt you and I know enough about the last ten years to be sure I’ve hurt you enough to last a

lifetime."

Jared turned in the drivers seat to look at Jensen, biting his bottom lip for a moment before speaking. "Jensen, you can't just show up again in my life like this and expect me to…I don't know, be okay with you stopping by just to say you've lost your memory and you're sorry for all the fucked things you've done. It's not fair."

"I'm sorry, Jared."

"And God help me because I actually believe you when you say that…and I've not…" Jared sighed, slumped down in the drivers seat, defeated and Jensen never wanted to see Jared like that. "I need to understand Jensen. Please, I just want you to tell me what happened to you. You owe me that much at least."

Jensen wanted to say no, maintain that any kind of contact between them was a bad idea, but he couldn't. Jared was right. After everything he'd done to him, after arriving back in his life and not letting go when he should have, he owed Jared what few answers he could give. "Okay, but not here."

Jared nodded and started the engine. They drove in silence except for Jensen giving the directions needed to find Nikki's Coffee Hut and a decent place to park. It wasn't until they were sitting inside, at a quiet booth in the back that Jensen finally broke the communications hold and spoke.

"What do you want to know?" Jensen asked, taking a sip of his coffee, his face hid a little behind the mug.

Jared fidgeted, shifted in his seat a couple of times, rearranging his arms before he sighed, then spoke. "I don't know, I didn't really get much past the whole amnesia thing. I mean, I guess I know it's a real condition and that, but. I don't know, it just seems like something that should only happen in the movies."

Jensen smirked, scratched the back of his head. "Yeah, tell me about it. I thought it was some sick joke when I woke up and my doc started freaking out."

"What did you say?"

"She asked me who was President and I said Clinton. That's when it all started to get crazy."

"Clinton? So, you didn't like, lose everything then?"

Jensen shook his head, "No…turns out I couldn't even get amnesia right. I'm a pretty rare case. My neurologist keeps asking if he can write it up for a medical journal."

"You said no?"

“I’m thinking about it,” Jensen said with a shrug. “It’d be anonymous, but it still makes me feel weird, having a load of doctors reading about me and all the crappy things I’ve done.”

“How much…” Jared shifted in his seat, “I mean, you don’t have to answer, but how much do you remember?”

“Some,” Jensen answered, wanting to be as honest as he could with Jared after everything that had happened. Like everything else, he deserved that much. “Enough…Enough to know that you have reason to hate me…That I didn’t end up anything like I thought I would.”

Jared looked down at the table, mouth turned down and sad. “I don’t know what you want me to say to that.”

“Sorry,” Jensen said feeling like crap, he didn’t want to make Jared to feel bad. “You don’t have to say anything, I’m not looking for you to say it’s okay, or forgive me.”

“Then what do you want?” Jared asked and it wasn’t angry, just curious.

“Why,” Jensen said softly.

Jared looked at him, blinked, and Jensen saw he thought wetness in his eyes. “If you’ve started to remember then you should know why.”

“No,” Jensen breathed, shaking his head. “Why did you stay with me for so long? Why did you let me hurt you so much?”

“Jen,” Jared choked out and this time Jensen knew he wasn’t imagining the tears in his eyes, felt his chest ache at the sight. “I loved you, you were everything to me and I didn’t want to let you go.”

Jensen took a shaky breath and reached across the table, put his hand on top of Jared’s. “I know it’s not worth much, and it doesn’t take away what I did, but I am sorry. So sorry. If I could do things again…”

“Don’t,” Jared interrupted, pulling his hand from under Jensen’s to wipe at his eyes. “You can’t change what happened.”

“I know,” Jensen said, felt broken. He wanted to, wanted to change things and take away all the hurt and pain he caused Jared.

“I should take you home,” Jared announced, standing up and abandoning his hardly touched coffee.

Jensen just nodded, hated himself even more because he didn't want to let Jared go.

*

When Jensen remembered how he convinced Jared to move LA he zoned out while doing the dishes and ended up breaking three plates and a wine glass.

"You what?" Jared exclaimed after a long moment, staring at Jensen with shock wide eyes and a flush of red rising up his cheeks.

Jensen sighed and fought the urge to roll his eyes; he knew Jared was going to react like this. He'd told Chris and Steve just as much when they'd suggested it. Still, if he wanted to make this happen then he had to be careful about it, stick to the plan and not let Jared just dismiss this as one of Jensen's schemes.

"You want to move to LA? As in Los Angeles?" Jared continued, hauling himself up and off the couch, pacing across the living room, stepping over and around the junk that littered the floor.

Jensen nodded, he'd been practicing this for a week, he had to get it right. "Please Jay," he said softly, pleading. "Don't just dismiss this, can't we just think about it?"

"But what about San Francisco?" Jared asked as he visibly deflated and Jensen grinned like a Cheshire cat on the inside, but kept his face sad but hopeful. Oh yeah, he was good, Jared was going to consider and that meant Jensen was going to get what he wanted. A move to LA.

"I know," Jensen said as he got off the couch, crossing over to where Jared stood he pulled him close. "I know we had those plans, but why can't they change? Things are different now."

"You're different," Jared replied, stepping back from Jensen. The emphasis wasn't lost on Jensen, after all it wasn't their first argument about how Jensen wasn't the same and all that shit. They always had it whenever Jensen wanted to go out and Jared was being boring and studying instead, whenever Jensen got wasted at a party or got fired from another job. Sure, maybe he had changed, but Jared always made it out to be a bad thing, when it totally wasn't. Jensen was having more fun than he'd had in years.

Right now, that wasn't important, making Jared agree to move to LA instead of San Francisco was. Jensen reached out carefully, tentatively stroking his fingers down Jared's arm, "I know that you don't agree with some of things I've done lately."

Jared opened his mouth to interrupt, but Jensen didn't let him give another talk about throwing away his life and all that carp, carried on. "But this is what I want to do."

Jared sighed, looked down at the floor, "You really think you, Chris and Steve can make

it big?"

"I know they can and I know I can," Jensen said softly, laid on the guilt. "Don't you believe in me?"

Jared looked up, hurt, "Of course I do…You know I do. This is just a lot to ask. I graduate in a week and I've got agents looking at stores for me in San Francisco…"

"Then there's still time to change our minds, to think about this," Jensen encouraged.

Jared scrubbed a hand down his face, "My entire business plan is based around San Francisco, I've been working on it all year. This has to work or how am I going to support us until you get a steady job?"

"Come on Jay, you're brilliant, it doesn't have to be in San Francisco. You can set up anywhere and I know what I want to do now, what I have to do," Jensen coaxed, Jared wanted him to have goals and direction, now he had them.

"I don't want to move to LA, Jensen, I don't want to set up there. It's all plastic and fake and smoggy and huge…We didn't want that," Jared said, sounding defeated, but obviously not willing to give up yet on San Francisco, on holding Jensen back and making him get a normal job, turn into his parents.

Jensen was surprised how hard it was proving to be to bend Jared to his way of thinking, but it was okay, Jensen still had an ace up his sleeve. "If we move to San Francisco then I'm going to be nothing more than a guy who plays gigs in bars and flips burgers during the day. If we move to LA I can be famous, I know it…" Jensen closed the distance between them, reached up to stroke his hand down Jared's cheek and said softly, "Don't you want that for me?"

Jared shut his eyes and sighed, leaned into the touch, "You're never going to forgive me if I say no, are you?"

Jensen rubbed his thumb along Jared's jaw, curled his other arm around his waist as he said, "Of course I will."

They both knew it was a lie and Jensen knew it.

Jared sighed again, rested his forehead against Jensen's and asked, "Is this going to make you happy?"

"This is what I want, yes," Jensen answered carefully, knew everything rested on this, when Jared was so close to saying yes. "I want us both to be doing what we love and being awesome at it."

Jared groaned, dropped his head down to rest in the crook of Jensen's neck as he finally

said, “Okay. I’ll start looking at shops in LA.”

“Thank you, love,” Jensen said, kissed the top of Jared’s head and smiled smugly to himself.

Exactly what he wanted.

*

“Jensen,” Jared sighed, stepping out of the house and shutting the door behind him. “Why are you here?”

“I miss you,” Jensen said, trying hard not to slur or breathe too hard on Jared. Didn’t want him thinking that the half bottle of dutch courage, aka whiskey, was a sign he wasn’t taking this seriously.

Jared’s nose wrinkled and Jensen giggled, wanted to kiss it, was so distracted by the thought he almost missed what Jared said next.

“God, you’re drunk,” he said in that tone that Jensen really hated, the one which said what a fuck up he thought Jensen was. He bit his tongue, insulting Jared wasn’t the way to win him back.

“Not drunk,” Jensen explained, making an effort to stand up straight and not let the way the porch was swaying put him off balance. “Dutch courage.”

“Go home, Jensen,” Jared said firmly and oh no, that was not the way things were supposed to go down. Though going down might totally be the right idea, Jared always liked his mouth, there was no way it couldn’t win him over if he offered to wrap it around his cock.

“Let me show you how sorry I am,” Jensen said and stepped forward, pressing up into Jared’s space as his hands moved to Jared’s waist, fingers running over Jared’s belt before he moved to open it.

“No, Jensen, no,” Jared growled, grabbing Jensen’s wrists tight and stopping his attempts.

Jensen tugged in frustration, “Why not? I’m trying to say I’m sorry.”

“You’re making an ass of yourself,” Jared spat and Jensen flinched at the disgust on his face. This wasn’t how it was supposed to go, Jared was supposed to realize what a mistake he made and take him back.

“This is what you wanted, isn’t it? To make me come crawling back!” Jensen snapped back, jerking his hands out Jared’s grip and stumbling backwards.

“No, I want you to leave me alone. You had your chances and it’s too late. I’ve found someone else and you need to get a grip and move on,” Jared said before going back inside, the sound of the lock clicking loud in Jensen’s ears. He started at the closed door for a long moment. It wasn’t true, it couldn’t be true. Jared didn’t have someone new, he couldn’t, not after Jensen.

It was all just to make him jealous. That’s what it was. Jensen stuck his fingers down his throat, retched and then threw up all over Jared’s welcome mat. It would serve him right.

When Jensen woke up, drenched in sweat he hoped it was a nightmare, but when he stood under the shower trying to wash the memory away he knew it was real. He stumbled out the cubicle and to the toilet, dropping to his knees and vomiting up the remains of dinner.

*

Jared was curled up on the couch when Jensen came home, he didn’t know what the time was but he knew it was late, didn’t think he had long to crawl into bed before the dawn light tried to keep him up.

“Huh,” Jensen grunted before kicking his shoes off with a thump. Jared hadn’t waited on the couch for Jensen since…well since they moved to LA.

“You’re home then,” Jared said and Jensen jumped, heart skipping a beat.

“Holy fuck!” He exclaimed, catching his breath and clinging onto the frame of the closet. “You’re awake,” Jensen knew he was stating the obvious but he’d just had the shit scared of out him so didn’t really care.

Jared nodded and sat up from where he’d been curled up on the couch that really was too small for him to sleep on. He held his arm and the blanket wrapped around him up in offering. Jensen stared for a moment then crossed the apartment, shedding his jacket onto the coffee table before climbing onto the couch next to Jared. Jensen tucked his legs underneath him as Jared’s arm settled around his shoulder, tugging him close and wrapping him in the large blanket Jensen recognized as one Momma Padalecki had knitted while Jared was at college.

“’m gonna fall asleep here, if you’re not careful,” Jensen said as he pillowed his head on Jared’s chest, traced patterns along the seam of his tee shirt. He was pretty glad that when he got hit on somewhere before midnight he’d been too stoned to have sex.

Jensen felt Jared press a kiss to the top of his head before he instructed, softly but firmly, “Don’t fall asleep yet.”

“I’ll try,” Jensen yawned, it seemed like forever since he and Jared were like this, just like this and it felt good. He didn’t realize how much he’d missed not being at odds, just

sitting wrapped up in each other and enjoying it.

“Why’d you wait up?” Jensen asked, trying to stop himself from slipping into a doze as they sat in the first comfortable silence they’d shared in months, maybe longer. He didn’t want to fall asleep and miss it.

“I haven’t seen you in over a week,” Jared replied softly, seeking out Jensen’s hand under the blanket, linking their fingers together. “I missed you.”

“I missed you too,” Jensen echoed, lifting his head to press a kiss to the sharp curve of Jared’s jaw. He did mean it, it was just that sometimes all they did was argue and fight and Jensen got so sick of Jared giving him that ‘I’m disappointed in you’ look that they needed some space. With Jared spending nearly all day working at the store, looking into expanding and shelter programs, it was easy to make sure they were like ships in the night.

“I know you got fired,” Jared said after another long, comfortable silence. Jensen tensed, how did Jared know?

“There was a message on the machine telling you not to bother showing up again, they’re keeping your wages to cover the damages,” Jared continued, his voice tired but calm.

Jensen wondered if this was some weird drug induced hallucination because there was no way Jared was this calm. Not after he’d lost his fifth job in as many weeks and wasn’t even going to get paid for the three nights he worked because he said thanks for firing me by pissing all over the bar and open bottles of drink.

“Why aren’t you shouting?” Jensen asked, confused.

Jared sighed and held Jensen closer, “It’s not like it’s worked before, has it?”

“So…punishment by cuddling?”

“No,” Jared answered and Jensen suddenly didn’t like how soft, how defeated he sounded. “Just a conversation. A question.”

“Why don’t I like the sound of this?”

“Just let me say this, okay, Jensen? Let me say this and then you can decide.”

Jensen nodded and Jared took a deep breath.

“I love you Jensen, sometimes I think you don’t believe it, but I still do…I just can’t do this anymore. I’ve given you time and space and I’ve forgiven you for everything, but if this is going to work, we’re going to work, some things have got to change.”

“Things like what?”

“It’s been three years since we moved here Jensen and all you’ve done is support Chris and Steve and play a couple of crappy bars, and I’ve supported you all the way. You need to stop using waiting for your big break as an excuse and…grow up. I need you to hold down a job and help me pay the rent and I need you to be here, with me. I need you to try.”

“Or what?”

“Or I can’t do this anymore.”

“What’s up?” Danneel asked, snapping him back to reality where he was sat in her car, driving to Hollywood so she could shop for an outfit for a Maxim event.

Jensen swallowed, hated his mind for only giving him this, the bad. Wondered if there even was any good to remember. “I want a lobotomy.”

Big Bang 2009 || Part Six

The week after Jared had showed up outside his therapy meeting and Jensen had heard nothing from him since, Jensen was hit by nothing less than pure shock. Once again waiting outside his therapy room, only this time sitting on one of the plastic chairs that lined the wall, was Jared.

After the way their last meeting had ended, Jensen had been resigned to never seeing Jared again. Had instead been battling all the memories that had assaulted him since, that seeing Jared seemed to have unlocked.

“Hi,” Jared said, with a small wave of a massive hand and a nervous smile.

When Jensen finally managed the power of speech again, he had to ask, “What are you doing here?"

Jared looked down at the floor for a moment, before looking back at Jensen. “I’m sorry about last week.”

“You don’t have to be,” Jensen tried to assure him, but Jared wasn’t having any of it.

“No,” Jared continued. “I guess I just wasn’t as ready to spend time with you as I thought I was.”

“And you came here to tell me that?”

Jared shook his head, “I didn’t get it then, but I do now…Or maybe it just needed some time to sink in. You’re not the same person I left and I should…I want to give you a chance… Us a chance to be friends again, I miss it.”

Jensen wanted to hug Jared, just wrap his arms around him and cling and beg him not to leave. “Why didn’t you tell me sooner, I thought…I thought you hated me.”

“I wanted to tell you sooner, or at least, tell you that I needed some time so I wouldn’t freak out again the next time I saw you. But when I got home I realized I didn’t have any way of contacting you. I looked you up in the book, but the number was disconnected.”

“Oh, yeah,” Jensen laughed guiltily. Of course Jared wouldn’t have his number, no doubt kept deleting it after every angry call he had to make to Jensen, asking, begging, to be left alone. “I moved out of my apartment before Christmas,” Jensen explained.

“You had somewhere to go, right?” Jared asked and Jensen was surprised to find that he actually look worried, genuinely concerned. Something he didn’t remember seeing on Jared’s features, at least not for him, in a long time.

“Yeah, it was my choice,” Jensen answered, figured there was no point trying to keep it a secret that he was living with Danneel, there wasn’t anything to it other than friendship. “I moved in with Danneel. She wanted to keep an eye on me and not have to worry about me making rent.”

Something flashed in Jared’s eyes and his nostrils flared, just a little, and Jensen wanted to believe it was jealously. Told himself it was stupid as Jared smiled, said warmly: “Sounds like she really cares about you?”

Jensen couldn’t help but smile in affection, “Yeah, I’m lucky. Though, she thinks it’s pretty ironic, that now we’re not together anymore she’s finally convinced me to move in with her.”

“How come?”

Oh, yeah. Jensen had never explained that to Jared. “Er…before I lost my memory, me and Danneel went out for a few years…I don’t really remember much of it.”

“Oh…” Jared said, looked like he wanted to say something else when frowned and asked, “You never lived with her?”

“No,” Jensen confessed, scratching the back of his head. “The only person I ever lived with was you.”

“Oh,” Jared said softly.

“Sorry, I didn’t mean to make you uncomfortable,” Jensen said, even though it was the

truth. He'd been determined not to need someone as much as he needed Jared when they were together, never to get so involved again that it would hurt so badly when it was over.

"No, that's okay," Jared assured. Jensen knew he was lying, but let it go because that was obviously what Jared wanted. "Are you waiting for Danneel again?"

Jensen nodded and explained, "Yeah, she's my ride. I don't have a license right now."

"They took your license because of the amnesia?"

Jensen squirmed a little, ashamed more because he knew it wouldn't surprise Jared rather than because he had to tell him. "No, I lost it about six months before, apparently. For a second DUI," Jensen said with a shrug, tried to brush it off as no big deal.

Thanks to some saving grace, that was the moment Danneel chose to appear, her surprise at seeing Jared again clear on her face. "Jared?"

"Hi," he greeted, almost shyly, foot shuffling as he held a hand out to her.

"Er, hi," Danneel replied, shaking his hand, eyes flitting between him and Jensen, just as surprised to see Jared there as he was. After all, the first thing he'd done when Jared had dropped him at home was tell her what a disaster it had been. "I take it you don't need a ride," Danneel said, finally settling on looking at Jensen, concern obvious in the way she worried at her bottom lip.

"We hadn't made any plans," Jared offered, "This is just the only way I knew how to contact Jensen."

Jensen could tell Danneel wanted to say something, probably to the tune of her and Chris' intervention after Jensen told them if Jared did call, he would see him again. Needed to see him again. Jensen looked at her and silently begged her not to, after a long moment of studying him intently she sighed. "You can give him the house number, if you want."

When Jensen turned to Jared, he was watching them both and looking out of place. Danneel wasn't an expert at subtle when she was off camera, though he got the feeling she had no intention of even trying when Jared was involved.

"If you've got plans, we could catch up later?" Jared offered, in a way that hadn't changed a bit since they were in high school. Overly cheerful and trying to hard to be genuine, disguising the fact that he didn't know what to say or do.

Jensen looked between him and Danneel, not sure what his answer should be. He knew he should go home with Danneel and try to put Jared out of his head, but he wanted to go and just be with him so badly. Try and capture the good memories of them he knew had to be in there somewhere. Jared wouldn't have stayed with him for so long if it had been

that bad since after Jensen could remember.

“It’s up to you,” Danneel said softly, putting her hand on Jensen’s arm. “I’ve got an early audition anyway, so I’m going to crash out as soon as I get home.”

God, he loved her. He knew it was a lie, that her audition wasn’t until the afternoon. It was written on the refrigerator in alphabet magnets and programmed into Jensen’s phone so he remembered to wish her luck. Even though she didn’t approve, she wasn’t going to stop him, or make him feel bad about spending time with Jared.

“I’ll see you in the morning,” Jensen said with a smile before he kissed her cheek.

“Okay, you be good,” she said softly in his ear, standing on her tip toes in her sandals to wrap her arms around his shoulders and hug him tight. Releasing him, she smiled at Jared and said her goodbyes before making her way down the corridor to the elevator. Jensen had that sense of déjà vu back again.

“So, here we are again,” he said, not wanting the silence to go on too long between them. It felt like it was dangerous, giving them both time to think about all the things that were unsaid between them, everything they were trying to ignore.

“I thought maybe you might want to go to this bar, where we…you, used to go a lot,” Jared said, starting to walk them towards the elevators.

“I don’t really drink that much anymore, but, yeah, I’d like that.”

Jared laughed as they arrived, he pushed the down button before saying: “You don’t drink? What ever happened to the Jensen that could drink everyone we knew under the table?”

“He fell on his ass while drunk and gave himself amnesia,” Jensen answered plainly. Jared looked at him for a long moment, obviously trying to work out if he was being serious or not. Jensen smiled, threw him a bone. “If that couldn’t teach me to learn the art of moderation, then I really would be a lost cause.”

Jared looked a little like a goldfish for a moment, before the elevator saved him with a sharp ping and the groaning of the opening doors. Inside it was busy and Jared didn’t say anything, though from the way he was biting on his bottom lip and bouncing from foot to foot, just a little, Jensen knew he wanted to. It wasn’t until he was out in the parking lot that he finally spoke.

“I’m glad,” is what he said, in a rush of nervous breath.

“Glad…?” Jensen frowned, really not sure what to think about the possibility of Jared being glad about anything he just said.

“Not that you were drunk or that you lost your memory, obviously,” Jared explained, leaning on the top of his car. “I’m just…I’m glad you’re not drinking a lot anymore.”

“I did that with you too, huh?” Jensen asked, though he already knew the answer. He saw it in the relief that had been on Jared’s face when he said he was learning to moderate, could see it even more now in the discomfort his question caused.

“Yeah,” Jared said carefully. Ducking down to unlock the car and get in, not continuing until Jensen was in the passenger side, belted in. “I mean, you remember what we used to be like in college, the way you used to laugh at me being a total lightweight. It was college and it was cool, until you weren’t in college anymore and it was like you couldn’t have fun anymore without a bottle.”

“I remember, at least, I remember parts…” Jensen answered, aware that now they were driving along the street, no longer parked in the garage and his silence must have gone on for too long. “Look, we don’t have to go this place, we can go somewhere else. Somewhere that’s not a bar,” Jensen offered.

“Isn’t going back to places you used to hang out supposed to help you remember?” Jared asked and it was clear that he wanted to help so badly that Jensen didn’t want to tell him the truth, let him believe that a few familiar sights and sounds and he’d be cured.

“Sometimes,” Jensen answered carefully. Didn’t want Jared to stop trying, to think that he couldn’t help, when just by being there, caring, was what Jensen needed.

“Only sometimes?” Jared sounded, and looked, disappointed by the answer.

Jensen shrugged, was careful with his words. “They don’t really know what triggers memories to come back. I’ve been in Danneel’s place for weeks now, only last week I remembered how I made the stain on the back of her couch.”

“How did you make it, then?” Jared grinned at Jensen as they stopped at some red lights.

Jensen really wished Jared hadn’t asked that, or that he’d thought before he spoke and had picked a better, less embarrassing example. Jensen couldn’t stop the flush that made his cheeks burn hot as he said, “You really don’t want to know.”

Jared looked at Jensen for a long moment and Jensen could tell the moment he worked out exactly how the stain was made and why Jensen was embarrassed as hell. “Oh,” he said quietly, before he started to laugh, loud and hard.

“Hey!” Jensen protested, affronted, and slugged Jared in the arm despite the fact that he was laughing himself. Jared’s amusement was still as infectious as it always was.

“Talk about awkward!” Jared gasped out, when he finally started to calm himself down, face red and eyes wet with tears as the lights went green and he stared driving again,

wiping at his face with one hand.

“It’s times like this, I hate everybody who’s not me,” Jensen said with an over exaggerated pout, slumping down in the passenger seat a little.

Jared chuckled, “Let me guess, she thought it was hilarious too?”

“She just walked in, looked at me staring at this…stain and wanting the ground to swallow me whole, and smiled. Actually smiled at me, laughed and said *oh, so are you finally going to stop asking me what that is and pay to get my couch cleaned?* And then she walked off!”

Jared grinned, “I think I like her.”

“You would,” Jensen said with a smile. “Y’know, if you knew her properly.” The more time Jensen spent with Jared, this grown up version of Jared, the more Jensen knew underneath it all he was still the same. The same Jared he had grown up with, who had been his best friend all his life and under the new confidence and layer of muscle the giggling little boy was still in there. He would love Danneel and given time, she would love him too.

“She means a lot to you, doesn’t she?” Jared asked, watching Jensen out the corner of his eye as he waited to turn into another parking garage, something soft, almost surprised in his voice.

“Yeah, she does,” Jensen replied with a smile, because it was true. Aside from Jared, perhaps even more so than Jared now that there was nothing but a tentative clutch at friendship between them, she was the most important person in his life. Whoever Chris had been to him, the relationship had changed between them when Jensen had started to clean up his act, when he’d stopped being the guy he’d been pretty much all the time Chris had known him.

“I mean, I know you said that you love her, but I guess I didn’t see that you meant it,” Jared said when he’d parked the car but didn’t get out, just looked at Jensen with what Jensen almost thought was amazement in his eyes.

“Why does that surprise you?” Jensen asked, unbuckling his seatbelt and turning to face Jared.

“I just…” Jared trailed off, looking out the window over Jensen’s shoulder, avoiding eye contact.

“What?”

“I just forgot what it looked like,” Jared said with a sad smile, before climbing out the car. “How much I missed it.”

Jensen wasn't sure if he was supposed to hear the second part, if Jared even said it or it was his imagination playing tricks on him. Either way, he couldn't bring himself to ask, just followed Jared out the car and into the Hotel Café in silence.

They didn't speak again until they were sitting at the far end of the bar, away from the majority of the people, a bottle of beer in front of each of them.

"I didn't mean to make you feel uncomfortable, earlier," Jensen said, before taking a pull of his beer. It was stupid to think that things would go smoothly between him Jared. Not with so much history and pain between them, with the anger for Jared and so many questions and the fresh sting of heartache and love for Jensen. It didn't stop Jensen from hoping or wishing, though.

"I guess it was stupid of me to think that maybe things wouldn't be that weird if we kept, you know, hanging out."

"You're not the only one who was hoping."

"Really?"

"Really," Jensen assured with a smile, less fractured.

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Jensen slumped down on the couch next to Jared, letting his messenger bag fall to the floor with a heavy thump. He wasn't sure how he was going to confess to Jared what had been going on for the last three months. Exactly how much trouble Jensen had managed to get himself in and how much he didn't really care. Mostly, he didn't know how he was going explain what he'd been doing, why he'd been lying to Jared on a regular basis.

"What's up?" Jared asked, fingers curling around the back of Jensen's neck and rubbing, carefully working out the tension that had been building there since that morning. Mainly as a result of knowing he would have to have this conversation with Jared when he got home.

"I have something to tell you," Jensen said softly, turning a little on the couch so he was facing Jared, his fingers now still on his neck. "And you're not going to like it."

The first time he realized that Danneel was home was when she leaned over the back of the couch. Her hand on his shoulder snapped him back to the present as she kissed the top of his head, before saying, "Hi sweetie."

"Hey," he said, tilting his head back to look up at her, watching her upside down as she pulled off her jacket and hung it over the back of the couch, eyes crossing a little as he tried to follow her too far back.

Jared frowned, head tilted as he studied Jensen for a long moment before prompting with a smile, "Okay, hit me with it."

Now it was Jensen's turn to frown as he pointed out, "You're smiling." Jensen was confused as to why Jared looked so dam happy while Jensen was trying to find the words to explain that he was currently flunking three classes, and worse. "Why are you smiling?"

"Because," Jared said, his smile refusing to budge and starting to frustrate Jensen. "You're not breaking up with me, so what ever you're going to say I can deal with. Plus, I know you, what ever it is; it's not going to be as bad as you think it is."

Jensen sighed, "No, its worse." It was at times like this that Jensen knew he really didn't deserve Jared. He was working hard to get good marks in his classes, so he could do what he wanted to do when they graduated. Then there was Jensen, who couldn't even be bothered to put in the small amount of effort he needed to get a passing grade, and lying about where he was going and what he was doing.

"Just tell me and let me be the judge," Jared softly, rubbing small, soothing circles into the skin behind Jensen's right ear with his thumb.

"You okay?" Danneel asked, dropping onto the couch next to him, pulling her legs up under her as she curled into him, small hand warm on his arm.

"Yeah," Jensen assured, forced a smile and tried to push the unwelcome memories away. "Just remembering."

Her face wrinkled in sympathy and she stroked his hair, he leaned into the touch as she asked, "Not good?"

Jensen took a deep breath and then blurted it out, "I'm flunking three of my classes."

Jared stared at Jensen for a long moment, mouth open a little and eyes wide in a look that would have been comical if it wasn't Jensen causing the shock. If he wasn't going to have to deal with the fall out, Jared's disappointed looks and the question why?

Jared audibly swallowed, "Can you run that by me again?"

"I'm flunking three of my classes," Jensen repeated softly, shifting back on the couch and out of Jared's reach as his hand dropped away from Jensen.

"Maybe," Jensen answered softly, not sure how long he'd slipped back out reality for this time. "Not the best but not the worst by far."

“You want to talk about it?” She offered, like she did after every memory that came back. Some he needed to talk out, to vent about, to try and piece together and understand, some he just wanted to forget, she understood not to push if he said no.

“Three?” Jared asked, obviously still trying to process what a massive failure Jensen was making of this third year of college.

Jensen nodded, “I said it wasn’t good.”

“God, I thought you were going to tell me something like…I don’t even know. I…How are you flunking three classes?”

Jensen bit his bottom lip, time to really come clean. “I’ve failed some tests and the last four papers I handed in I got F’s for.”

“F?” Jared gawked, “I didn’t think you were capable of getting an F. What about all the time you’ve been spending in the library? Studying?”

Jensen looked down at his knees, felt a wave of guilt, heavy and sickening washing over him. Not for the flunking, but for the fact he’d been lying to Jared for weeks. “I haven’t,” Jensen said quietly.

“Jen, what do you mean you haven’t? You’ve been going at least three nights a week. We eat then I go to the gym and you go to the library, we come home and have sex.”

“I lied,” Jensen said carefully, watching the way Jared’s face went from shocked to confused to angry to hurt.

“You lied?”

Jensen nodded, “I’m sorry.”

“Why would you lie to me?” Jared asked, voice small and lost, making Jensen feel truly guilty about what he’d been doing for the first time. “What have you been doing instead?”

“I’ve been…” Jensen trailed off, knew what he was going to say was going to make Jared mad. Didn’t want to confess and start a fight.

Jared moved back on the couch, shoulder visibly shaking as he asked, “Jen, are you trying to tell me you’ve been cheating?”

“No!” Jensen assured in an instant, reaching out squeeze Jared’s knee. It was bad, but

not that bad. “God, no…I would never cheat on you. Ever.”

“Then where have you been going?”

“I’ve been hanging out with Chris and Steve,” Jensen said in a rush. There, it was out there in the open between them. Jensen had made the choice to hang out with them and now it was time to get the sit for it from Jared.

“I lied,” Jensen confessed memory fresh, its sting still sharp, “I lied to Jared.”

“About what, sweetie?” Danneel prompted gently, curling her fingers around his supportively.

“I think…” Jensen huffed, trying to find sense in the black, piece together the shards of what he knew and what he thought he knew to find an answer. “I think he asked me not to be friends with Chris and Steve.”

“Do you remember why?”

”What?” Jared asked, frowning. “Chris and Steve? You’ve been hanging out with them instead of studying?”

Jensen sighed, frustrated, “It’s not like that.”

“Except for the part where it is,” Jared retorted, voice tense and sharp. Jensen didn’t like it, him being like this.

“Jared, that’s not fair.”

“No, Jensen, lying to me wasn’t fair,” Jared said, crossing his arms over his chest and moving back out of Jensen’s reach, making it clear that it wasn’t okay. “Promising me that you were going to stop hanging around with them and then lying to me about it, that was unfair. If you didn’t think there was anything wrong with it then you would have told me.”

“I didn’t tell you because I knew you were going to act like this!” Jensen snapped. Jared was supposed to support him and make him feel better. Not judge him like this.

“Christ Jensen, it’s not like I don’t have good reason,” Jared announced, standing up and starting to pace in front of the couch. “You nearly flunked last semester because of those two and now you’re flunking this one too. What am I supposed to say? Well done?”

“Jared thought they were the reason I was flunking my third year,” Jensen answered,

mentally picking at the scene coming together in his mind, trying to find more, what was left to remember. As much as he was sick of knowing these sort of things about himself he also knew it would nag, catching like a mental hangnail.

"Were they?"

"They're my friend Jay, my friends. I'm not flunking because of them, I'm flunking because of me. Maybe I wouldn't have kept it a secret if you hadn't made me feel so dam guilty about who my friends are."

"Are you trying to say this is my fault?"

"No, I just want you to cut me some slack!"

"God, I'm sorry Jen…" Jared sighed, shoulders slumping like he was being deflated. "I just…I don't want to see you fail and…they're not good for you."

"They're my friends," Jensen said, didn't care if Jared thought they were good for him or not. The three of them had fun hanging out, kicking back and jamming on their guitars with a couple of beers and a joint, maybe something stronger. Something he couldn't do with Jared. "I'm not going to give them up."

Jensen shook his head. "Of course they weren't. If it hadn't been them then it would have been something else."

Danneel nodded slowly, didn't argue, and instead asked, "What sparked this off, huh?"

Jensen motioned to the papers scattered across the coffee table, a stack of newspapers, books and a couple of medical journals tucked at the bottom. "I was working on my application essay, guess it got me thinking about college the first time round."

Danneel smiled and pressed a kiss to his temple, ear rings jangling, unfocused in front of his eyes. "So it's your anxiety talking. You're going to do fine, great even. They're going to take a look at your portfolio and snap you up."

"What am I supposed to say if they asked why I dropped out of college the first time?"

Danneel smirked, "Play the amnesia card?"

Jensen glared at her, "I'm being serious."

"So was I!" She giggled, "Okay, maybe not entirely serious, but honestly, do you know the answer to that question? The real one?"

Jensen shook his head, unsure, had ideas, vague feelings picked up from pieced together shards of the past that had come back to him. “Maybe, I don’t know…”

She smiled sadly at him, “Jensen, I’ve never been to college, never even applied so I could be wrong, but I don’t think there is a right or a wrong answer.”

Jensen raised his eyebrows and snorted, “I think *I was bored and a jackass* is probably the wrong answer.”

She rolled her eyes, “Well, if you put it like that.”

“How am I supposed to put it then?” Jensen groaned, “There is no good way of saying I screwed up.”

“You have to make it all about now,” she said cheerfully, ruffling his hair. “You might have dropped out because you weren’t stimulated, the courses were wrong or too hard, or just because college wasn’t right for you at the time, you don’t know. I don’t think the why matters so much as showing that you’re serious about the now, that you want this and making sure they know it.”

“Why do you put up with me?” Jensen asked, smiling at in affection.

She laughed in response as she hauled herself up and off the couch, “Because I am an awesome human being. What do you say we forget cooking and order take out?”

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When Jensen had decided that it was time to go home and see his parents Danneel had pulled a face, told Jensen as far as she knew the relationship was non-existent from the way he had spoken about them. Or not. Most of the memories that had come back to Jensen had been about Jared and until that moment he hadn’t thought about it, that there were no memories of his family.

Jensen knew going home wasn’t going to be easy, not when he didn’t know what he had done to his family, if he had caused them as much pain as he had Jared. But he had to do it. Danneel thought it was a terrible idea, but refused to let him go alone.

Danneel pulled the car to a stop outside Jensen’s family home, it felt so weird to be sitting there on the street he grew up on again, Jared’s house right next door. Jensen remembered the last time he was here…at least, the last time he was here before he lost his memory. He and Jared had spent Christmas at home, three days living in separate houses, sneaking out to meet in the yard after their parents were asleep like they had when they were kids. Only it hadn’t been to read comic books by flash light and share cookies and packets of candy sneaked from their kitchens.

It stung, hard and sharp inside his chest and Jensen swallowed down hard and blinked

away the dampness that welled in his eyes. He didn't know what his parents thought, how much of the terrible side of him he was just discovering they had seen. Whether when he knocked on the door he would get a hug or a drunken lecture from his father and his momma's disapproval.

"You still don't have to do this," Danneel said softly, squeezing his knee as she turned off the rental's engine.

Jensen turned his gaze to the Padalecki house, as much his home growing up as the one next door. Maybe even more so, the hours he spent playing in Jared's room, being fed and cared for by his momma while his dad drank and his momma cried. In Jared's house he had always felt safe and loved and maybe coming back to Texas was as much about trying to find that feeling again as much as it was about seeing his parents, explaining what had happened to him.

"I as good as grew up in that house," Jensen said, barely more than a whisper as he nodded at the red and white Padalecki house, as immaculate as he remembered it.

Danneel slid her hand from his knee to his hand, fingers curling together. "Jared's house?"

Jensen nodded and Danneel smiled, "It looks really nice."

"It is," Jensen agreed after a long moment, allowing himself time to wallow in childhood memories, when things were happier, uncomplicated.

"We could go say 'hi' if you wanted," she suggested, giving his hand a gentle squeeze.

"No," Jensen said instantly and shook his head. He couldn't imagine what Jared, who had told his parents everything, had said about them. About what Jensen did.

"Why not, you love them like family, they must feel the same way about you."

"You didn't want me to come see my parents, but now you're encouraging me to go see the Padalecki's?" Jensen questioned, incredulously, eyebrow raised. "You know you're giving pretty mixed messages, right."

Danneel huffed, smirking a little as she did, "Well I've accepted that you're going to be stubborn as hell about this."

Jensen smiled softly, god he loved her for doing this for him when he was the last person to deserve her time and care.

"But," She continued, "just sitting here and watching you look at that house, talk about Jared's parents and I know you want to see them, maybe more than you do your own."

Jensen sighed, “But what if they don’t want to see me?”

Danneel shrugged, “I can’t answer that, but if you want to see them, you should. You’ll only regret it otherwise.”

“I’m not ashamed of you,” Jared coaxed softly, pulling Jensen close to him, arm around his waist as they made their way up the path to Jared’s house. “And I’m not going keep us a secret any more.”

“Are you sure this is a good idea?” Jensen asked, eyes darting between the front windows of his parents and Jared’s house, even though he knew his parents were away for the weekend, trying to wriggle out of Jared’s grip.

Jared just grinned and held him tighter, “My parents love me and they love you. You’re as good as part of the family already, they should know about us. I want them to know about us.”

“What if they don’t approve?”

Jared shrugged as they climbed the porch stairs, “Not that I think for a second they won’t be happy for me, for us, then they’ll just have to not approve.”

Jensen raised an eyebrow, “You love your family, like, a lot. You think it’s going to be that easy if they suddenly start chasing you with the pitch forks?”

Jared snorted out a laugh, paused where his hand was raised ready to knock on the door and turned, pressing himself along the length of Jensen, holding him tight around the middle. “Dude, my Great Aunt Mildred has been living with her ‘friend’ Rose for the last twenty odd years.”

Jensen leveled a serious look at Jared and asked, “They why haven’t you told them before now?”

Jared sighed, leaned forward and rested his forehead against Jensen’s, “Because I knew this is how you would react…I thought maybe since it’s been four years and we’re living together, you might be ready to be out with at least my parents.”

“You promise they won’t tell my parents,” Jensen swallowed, “my dad?” Because that’s what it came down to after all, maybe in time his momma would come to accept it, who he was, but never his father…and Jensen wasn’t to keen to see his immediate reaction to the news either.

*Jared nodded and assured softly, “You know they won’t.” **They know your dad** was left silent, hanging in the air between them and Jensen was glad Jared didn’t say it.*

Jensen took a deep breath, reminded himself that the Padalecki's had raised Jensen as much as his own momma had. He'd been best friends with Jared from the moment they moved next door and they were happy together. His parents would be happy for them. "Okay, I'm ready. Let's do this."

"Jensen," Danneel's voice and her hand gently shaking his shoulder snapped him back to the present. Bile raised in the back of his throat, almost a Pavlovian reaction now to remembering, to snapping back between the past and the present.

"Sorry," Jensen gasped, turning to look at her, eyes taking a moment to focus again. "Sorry."

"I lost you there for a minute," she said, her concern written across her face. "You want to tell me about it?"

"They know," Jensen confessed with a deep and shaky breath. "Jared's parents knew about him and me…we came here to tell them."

"You remember?"

Jensen nodded, tried to stop the tremble that ran through his body as he tried to process the new information, the slight tilt it gave his world. "Standing on the porch, just before we went in…I was afraid."

"What about your parents?" Danneel prompted carefully.

Jensen shook his head, "No. That's what I was afraid of, that my dad would find out."

Danneel bit her bottom lip, pulled him into a close hug. "It's okay, we don't have to go see them if you don't want to."

Jensen looked at the house again, felt a twinge of longing for the sense of home and safety he always had inside. Wanted to go and see the people who'd been like second parents to him, who had loved him and helped him and seen him through all the crap that came with being Alan Ackles son.

Jensen shook his head, the Padalecki's weren't his family, however much he had wished and prayed they would be as he grew up. Jared would have told them about the break up, about him, and he wouldn't be welcome. Why hurt himself even more than he had to?

A deep breath and then Jensen was out of the car, said to Danneel, "Let's do this," as he took her hand in his own and crossed the street.

When his momma opened the door she stood there open mouthed and staring for a horrible moment. Jensen wanted to run, but Danneel held his hand tight enough to break

bones he was sure and he was chained to the spot as his momma gaped.

Finally something in her seemed to break and Jensen only caught the brief glimpse of tears in her eyes before she was wrapping her arms around him and holding him tight. Jensen breathed in deep the smell of home and family as he curled his arms around his momma in return and held her tight.

“You said you were never coming back.” His momma choked out and Jensen could hear the heartbreak in her voice. He didn’t know what he’d done to hurt her like this, wasn’t sure he wanted to but wished he could take it away, undo everything wrong he ever did.

“Momma.” Is all Jensen could manage in return, unable to let go of her, of the moment, afraid that this was something else he was going to lose.

Eventually she eased herself back from Jensen, taking a moment to wipe her eyes and fix her hair before she looked up him. She gasped at his appearance and from the look on her face Jensen figured it wasn’t the good kind of surprise.

“What happened to you, baby?” She asked from behind her hand, eyes moving up and down his frame and he didn’t tell her that he had looked worse over a month ago.

“Something big has happened to me, momma, I think we should maybe talk about it.”

His momma nodded and started to step back, and that’s when she noticed Danneel stood beside Jensen, looking nervous and out of place. Jensen smiled weakly at her, she was always confident and charming…then he realized, in all the time they had been together before, she had probably never met his family. Jensen bit down on a sigh, more evidence what a total tool he was to her.

Before his momma could say anything Jensen pulled Danneel a little closer and made the introductions, “Momma, this is my friend Danneel. Danni, this is my momma, Donna Ackles.”

“Nice to meet you, ma’am,” Danneel greeted as she extended her hand in offering, a picture of Southern charm and manners.

Donna took the offered hand and shook it with a smile, “Please to meet you Danneel, and do call me Donna.”

Danneel just smiled and followed Jensen and his momma inside. Jensen was struck how silent the house was, it had always been noisy throughout his childhood. Between Mackie, him and Josh, his momma’s crying and his dad’s shouting Jensen couldn’t remember the last time it was so quiet he could hear the squeak of the floorboards beneath them.

Once they were sat around the kitchen table and his momma had stopped fussing Jensen

explained to her what had happened, about the amnesia. Jensen wasn't sure how she took the news, she was silent and wide eyed as he detailed the accident, how Danneel and Chris had been helping him and how slowly, some things were starting to come back.

When Jensen had finished and fallen into silence he gave her all the time she needed to process the information, Danneel's hand warm and comforting on top of his own. Eventually Donna cleared her throat and wiped away the tears that were threatening to fall from her eyes.

"Why didn't you call me?" She asked softly, reaching across the table to take Jensen's free hand in her own.

Jensen shrugged, sighed softly, "Everything was just so confusing when I woke up…I didn't even want Chris or Danneel to help, I just wanted to be left alone to feel sorry for myself. They didn't give up on me and now I'm here."

His momma took a shaky breath and her eyes welled up again, "So you don't remember anything."

Jensen shook his head, "After the first year of college? Not really…Some things have come back to me, but it's not much."

Something seemed to snap then in his momma and she cracked open, face falling into her hands as she broke down into quiet sobs, her shoulders shaking as tears dropped onto the table top.

"Momma?" Jensen asked, afraid that this was his fault. How could he put something right if he didn't even remember what he'd done?

Jensen swallowed nervously and Danneel let go of his hand, shoving at his shoulder gently and motioning with her head at his momma. "Go on," she said softly.

Jensen nodded and climbed out of his seat, rounded the table to wrap his momma up tight in his arms as she cried. She clung to him tightly and Jensen didn't know how long they stayed there, didn't care, this was his momma and he had to make things better. Had to put right what ever he did wrong, what ever he did to hurt her so badly.

When her tears had finally stopped and her cries had softened to wet sniffles, muffled by the clean dish cloth she was using to wipe her face, Jensen sat down in the chair next to her, pulled it close. "What's wrong?"

She shook her head, wiping away another stray tear and giving him a small smile, "It doesn't matter."

"Momma," Jensen said calmly, but with no room for argument. "You just sat here and cried for ten minutes, you can't tell me that's nothing."

Her bottom lip shook for a moment before she answered quietly, “I thought I was never going to see you again, my little boy.”

Jensen took a deep breath, steeled himself for what was to come, to hear of what ever awful thing he had done to make his momma break down like this. To think he would never come back. “What did I do?”

“You father found out about you and Jared, you came home for a visit last year, I think you wanted money. You father picked a fight about how you weren’t…making much of yourself and you told him,” her voice was shaking and tears started falling again.

Jensen wrapped his arm around his momma’s shoulders and held her tight as she continued, “You both said such horrible things and then you stormed out.” Donna took a shaky breath, “Three months later he had a heart attack and…I called you but you…you wouldn’t come to the funeral. You said that you hated him and me… That you were never coming back here.”

“I tried to raise you right, teach you the word of God, and this is how you repay me?” Alan spat, fat finger pointing across the room at Jensen, his momma sat shaking on the couch begging them in hushed tones to stop. “You were always a disappointment!”

“What did you expect? When all I had to inspire me was you, a useless drunk!” Jensen laughed, mirthlessly, watched his father turn a deep red and wondered if he was going to burst a blood vessel.

“You come here and say that you worthless, dirty fag,” Alan thundered and Jensen laughed, wondered why he was ever afraid of him. “You’ll show your father some respect.”

“You know what they say, dad,” Jensen sneered. “Everyone turns into their parents, wonder if mom knows you like to take it up the ass.”

The fist to his face hurt like hell, even though Jensen had known it was coming. He kneed his dad in the balls in response and spat the blood pooling in his mouth down on him before leaving, shouting, “Fuck you,” with feeling.

Jensen thought he was going to vomit, swallowed it down and held his momma even tighter. “I’m sorry,” he whispered softly into her hair, barely more than a breath. “I’m sorry, momma.”

Donna clung onto his arms like she was afraid he was going to take it all back and vanish, croaked out, “I can’t believe you’re here.”

Jensen kissed the top of her head and looked at Danneel, pleaded with his eyes for some help, some advice on what to do. Tried to process everything that his momma had said, that his dad was dead. Gone forever.

Jensen can't fight the tears that form in his eyes, making the world wet and blurry. For all his faults he'd been Jensen's dad, in between drunk patches he'd taught Jensen how to pitch and catch, ride a bike and slipped him five dollar bills for comics. He was Jensen's dad and he was dead…and the last thing he'd said to him was 'fuck you'.

*

"How did the visit home go?" Jared asked as they slid into what was becoming their regular table tucked away in the corner, sipping his coffee and giving himself a foam moustache.

For a moment Jensen wanted to laugh but then Jared's question registered inside his head and his insides sank. "I…it was hard," Jensen answered, voice scratchy even though he didn't mean it to be.

"Are you okay?" Jared questioned, hand reaching across the table to lay on top of Jensen. Such a simple act of comfort, which made Jensen hurt even more than he did before, aching for what he couldn't have, but still he couldn't pull away.

Jensen took a deep breath, thought of ripping off a band aid and said, "My dad's dead."

Jared looked sad and Jensen knew before Jared said softly, "Yeah, I know."

"Your parents told you?" Jensen asked, his voice dangerously close to breaking.

Jared nodded his head, "Your momma invited me to the funeral, but I couldn't make it."

Jensen bit his bottom lip, eyes focused in the table with the intent of not crying as he confessed, "I didn't go."

"What?"

"According to my mom, I didn't go to the funeral…I refused to go."

Jared sucked in a sharp breath and Jensen didn't dare look at him, didn't want to see the judgment and disgust in his eyes. So when Jared's voice came soft and calm, Jensen didn't know what to think. "You and your dad didn't have the best of relationships."

Jensen looked up, met Jared's eyes and found nothing but sadness in them, felt like he was going to be overwhelmed by it and his own. "He was my dad and I should have been there…While I was with my mom, I remembered. I remembered that the last thing we did

was fight."

"Jen-," Jared begun but Jensen cut him off. He knew what Jared was going to say, try and tell him it was okay because his dad was a drunk and he liked nothing better than to argue, but that didn't matter.

"I started it…I went there looking for a fight with him and I got one. I told him about us…about you and me and the last thing I said to him was f you. I made my momma think she was never going to see me again…if it wasn't for the accident, I don't think she would have."

"You can't know that," Jared said and Jensen smiled weakly at his attempt to reassure him.

"I guess I can't explain it, but I do…I know," Jensen sighed. It was so hard to try and explain what was happening to him, how some things he just knew without question or doubt, while he struggled to remember people's names. "When I remember things it's not just the words…I remember how I felt, how things looked and hell, sometime even how things smelled…and I know. I was so determined that nothing was going to make me go back there."

Jared lowered his head though the hair that fell across his face didn't hide how distressed he looked, like a lost boy. Jensen hated himself for making Jared feel that way. Finally as the silence threatened to stretch on, become even more tense and uncomfortable, Jared spoke softly, "I don't know what to say."

Jensen felt something inside his chest crack just a little more, "You don't need to say anything."

"Yes," Jared insisted, "Yes I do."

Jensen moved his hand, placed it on top of Jared's and squeezed gently, tried to return some of the comfort Jared had wanted to give him. "It's okay."

Jared huffed out a breath and looked up at Jensen, eyes dark and intense. They made Jensen's breath catch in his throat. "It's not, god it's really not. I just want to help you, make things better…easier for you. And I don't know how. I'm afraid that I'm going to say the wrong thing, make things worse."

"Jay," Jensen soothes, rubbing his thumb over Jared's knuckles. "It's okay, honest. I don't think there is anything you can say, I don't think there's anything anyone can say."

Jared gave him a small, sad smile, "Doesn't stop me from wishing I could."

Jensen's heart swelled with affection for Jared, wanting so badly for this to be his again for more than one night a week after therapy. "I know, but you shouldn't beat yourself up

about it."

"Aren't I supposed to be comforting you?"

Jensen shrugged, managed a small but more genuine smile, "I don't know, I think maybe a little distraction might have helped."

"Still," Jared said, drinking from his mug with a guilty set to his shoulders. "You know I'm here, if you need to talk about stuff, right?"

"I know." Jensen nodded, even though he knew sharing anything emotional with Jared was a bad idea. That being supportive and caring was in his nature, just who Jared was and no reflection on how he felt for Jensen, not a sign that the love he couldn't abandon was returned.

They lapsed into silence again, Jensen sipping carefully from his mug, the liquid still hot inside while Jared gulped his down, giving himself more foam made facial hair. Eventually it was too much to bear, the weight of Jared glancing up at him from under his eyelashes, like he wouldn't notice, brow furrowing briefly in concern.

To stop the tension before it went too far, Jensen blurted out the first thing that came to mind: "Your parent's house still looks good."

Jared laughed softly, "Does it? They don't live there anymore."

"Oh," Jensen replied, glad he didn't knock on the door in the end, psych himself up to face the Padalecki's only to find they'd move to god knows where.

"Yeah," Jared shrugged, "they moved about two…three, maybe? Years ago. Jeff has his own place in Dallas, he's a doctor now, married a nurse from the hospital where he was an intern. I've not lived at home since I left for college and it looked like Meg was going to do the same. So they decided to get something smaller and ended up in a little two bed place out in the suburbs."

"I thought about knocking…saying hi," Jensen confessed quietly, eyes going wide when he realized the words had come out.

"Why didn't you?" Jared asked, "I mean, obviously they wouldn't have been there, but what stopped you from trying. I think the new owners have my parents address, they might have given you it."

Jensen stared down into the inky black of his coffee cup, "I remembered."

"Remembered what?" Jared questioned, his voice shaky and Jensen hated that there was obviously so many things it could have been, so many terrible things.

“That you told them. About us being together. I remembered standing outside your house, on your porch. You had your arm around me and even though I knew my parents were away I was still afraid of my dad seeing me, finding out. I was scared about how your parents would react and you told me it would be okay.”

“You remember going inside?”

Jensen shook his head, “No, that was it…What should I remember?” Did they take it badly?”

Jared shook his head, smiled wide, all teeth and dimples and it made Jensen’s chest ache because it was so perfect and it used to be just for him. Not anymore. “They were great.”

“You said they would be,” Jensen said with a soft smile. Let the warmth of Jared’s conviction from that memory wash over him, enjoyed it for just a minute.

“They loved you ever since you were a kid, you and Mackenzie,” Jared said and there was an honesty to his words that made Jensen draw in a sharp breath.

Trying to break the emotion pooling in his chest Jensen teased, “Not Josh?”

Jared snorted in reply, “They had enough of the teenage boy hormones going on with Jeff.”

Jensen managed a smirk, “I guess you’ve got a point there.”

Jared grinned back at him for a moment, before it settled into a softer, more affectionate smile. “How’s your mom?”

Jensen shifted uncomfortably in his chair, couldn’t meet Jared’s eyes anymore as he thought about his momma. What he had done to her and what he’d put her through ever since he…ever since he became that Jensen. “She’s doing alright, I think.”

“I bet she was glad to see you, know that you’re alright, after everything.”

“Yeah, she was,” Jensen answered, even though he knew Jared was clearly talking about the accident, ignoring the elephant in the room of what Jensen has said before. “My mom asked me if it was because of dad,” Jensen said before Jared could speak again, looking over his shoulder and out the window, vision hazy and unfocused.

“What? Your accident?” Jared asked, sounding confused and Jensen guessed he didn’t word it very well.

“No,” Jensen said, shaking his head and correcting, “Me. She wanted to know if I ended up like this…such a screw up because she never left him.”

“Wow,” Jared gaped, slumping back in his seat, looking shocked. “She really asked that?”

Jensen nodded, wasn’t sure he could find any words to explain how much it had hurt when she had pulled him aside while Danneel washed up in the bathroom just before bed on their last night in Texas.

“What did you say?” Jared asked, before flinching, dragging Jensen’s attention back to him and the way he looked nervous, trying to make himself smaller. “I mean, if you want to tell me that is. You don’t have to. Or that I agree with her, thinking you’re a screw up.”

Jensen smiled, humoring Jared until he finally stopped rambling in favor of looking sheepish. “First off, I *am* a screw up, or at least I was and I’m trying damn hard not to be one again. Second, of course you can ask. I wouldn’t have told you if I wasn’t ready to talk about it.”

Jared looked torn for a moment and Jensen shot him a gentle, but warning glare, telling him not to think about trying to argue that he wasn’t a screw up. Jared huffed under his breath before finally saying, “Alright, I won’t say anything. What did you tell you mom then?”

“I said no, it wasn’t because of him,” Jensen answered. It had been the truth when he said it to his momma and it was the truth then, even if Jared didn’t look like he believed it.

“Did you say it to help her or because you think it’s true?”

“A bit of both,” Jensen said with a shrug. “Maybe…mostly because I think it’s true.”

“Really?” Jared asked and it was clear from his face that it wasn’t the answer he was expecting from Jensen.

“You think it’s my dad’s fault?” Jensen couldn’t help but question, maybe it was easier for Jared to see it in black and white. It was just his neighbour, he didn’t have to live with him and he wasn’t his dad. “It’s not like he…he wasn’t bad all the time and when he was, I had your dad. It wasn’t like I was never taught the difference between right and wrong, if anything I learned that lesson faster and harder than most other kids.”

“That doesn’t mean he didn’t…you know, mess you up,” Jensen would have laughed at how delicate Jared was trying to be, if he hadn’t been sure it would have hurt his feelings.

Jensen sighed, looked up at the ceiling and tried to put his thoughts in order enough to be able to explain to Jared what he realized flying back from Texas. “If I used him as a get out of jail free card for everything I did, then how would I be any better than him? Than how I was?”

“I suppose you’re right,” Jared finally admitted and Jensen brought his gaze back down

to earth, smiled at him.

“I am right…and honestly, I don’t believe it,” Jensen continued, feeling more confident with Jared’s tentative understanding. “I’ve thought about this a lot since the accident. The mistakes I made were mine, because of me, and I might not know what they all were or why I made them, but I can’t blame dad for them.”

“That’s…” Jared said, watching Jensen intensely with wide eyes and lax lips.

“What?” Jensen squirmed, felt his cheeks flushed red. Danneel had seemed impressed with his attitude, assured him that it was something the old Jensen never would have said or done and smiled in pride.

“That’s really mature,” Jared said, breaking into a massive grin for several beats before his eyes widened again and his jaw dropped. “Oh wow, sorry, that came out so badly.”

Jensen smirked, “Its okay, Jared.”

“It’s not,” Jared replied, shifting in his seat as a flush of pink crept up across his cheekbones.

Jensen laughed softly, tried to put Jared at ease, for all that he could remember of himself in the missing years, Jared had every right to be surprised. “It is…this…friendship between us is still really new and you’re trying to deal with more than one version of me. I get confused, so you’re allowed to too.”

“I just…I look at you and I see Jensen, but I’m not sure I know who that is anymore. You’re nothing like you were before the accident, when we were together at the end. I guess sometimes I think you’re going to be like you were before, back when we were first at college, but that’s not you either….but you’re still Jensen, my best friend from before I can remember…Man, am I making any sense? I feel like I’m talking shit.”

“If it’s too much,” Jensen said quietly, “I’ll understand if you don’t want to keep seeing each other.” Jensen swallowed, he had to offer, he had to make sure Jared did the right thing for himself, even if he didn’t know if he could do. If he could give Jared up, but if that’s what Jared needed then he would. Jensen had caused him too much pain and suffering over the years, he wouldn’t, couldn’t cause him anymore.

“No,” Jared replied in an instant, shaking his head and reaching out for Jensen like he was afraid he’d suddenly vanish. “No, I do…I do want us to keep seeing each other.”

“Are you sure?” Jensen asked. He had to be sure that Jared wanted this, that he wasn’t going to hurt him even more by just being in his life.

“I’m sure, Jen,” Jared assured, reaching across the table to take Jensen’s hand in his and give it a firm squeeze before letting go. “I still mean what I said before, you’re my best

friend, you always have been. Being able to have you back in my life makes me happy like you wouldn't believe…I'm just getting to know the new Jensen."

"How am I doing so far?"

Jared beamed, "Pretty good."

Big Bang 2009 || Part Seven

Slowly they had settled into a routine of sorts, Jared would meet Jensen after his group therapy sessions and they would go for coffee, occasionally dinner. Danneel would be waiting for Jensen at home, normally with a chick flick and a bottle of wine, demanding to know everything they talked about.

Part of Jensen wanted to play their time together close to the chest, to keep it secret between him and Jared. Their friendship, closeness, was starting to blossom again and Jensen wanted to protect it, keep it as their own. Still she managed to pull things out of him, with gentle coaxing and prompting. There wasn't anything secret in what he and Jared talked about, but Jensen liked that it was their time. A chunk of time each week that he had to himself, just him and Jared.

They more they met the more comfortable they became around each other, the more Jensen learned about the new Jared and the new Jensen. With each day that passed he seemed less like a stranger to himself and he was growing more content with who he was. He wasn't the Jensen that fell and bumped his head, heartbroken and angry and bitter, and he wasn't the bright eyed, fun loving optimist that he woke up as.

It was a good way to balance out the memories, the flood of good and mostly bad that came back to him, without care for where he was or who he was with. The more time he spent with Jared, the more of the good that he remembered. He didn't want that to stop. Didn't want to go back to hating himself after every returned memory, the nausea churning in the bottom of his stomach at the things he had done, the way he had hurt people.

Jensen was brand new and he was starting to feel like an adult. It was a weird feeling, but he was starting to get used to it. Danneel had even managed to swing him a job at the coffee house at the end of her street that they both frequented. It was only part time, but it felt like real work, like he was actually doing something useful, where as writing for the LATimes was more like fun.

He and Jared had been meeting up for coffee every week nearly three months when Jared suggested that he meet Sandy again. Jensen instantly said no. Not only did Sandy have more than one valid reason to resent Jensen, there was only so much he could handle. He could tell Jared congratulations on the wedding and listen to him talk about cake tasting sessions and the politics of table place planning, but meeting the fiancé would be too

much.

Jensen didn't want to meet her and like her. He wanted to hate her for having everything he ever wanted, a happy life with Jared. What he had screwed up and thrown away.

Somehow Jared convinced him to meet her and that's how the Sunday's in the park started. Sandy had been everything Jensen had dreaded, cheerful and sympathetic of his accident, if she harbored any resentment for him she hid it well. She was lovely and as much as Jensen wanted to hate her, it was a struggle.

They had met in the park, Jared, Sandy, the dogs and Jensen. The dogs had loved Jensen, the way he petted and played with them, smelling of Icarus. That became a routine, though that first Sunday was the only that Sandy attended. She started teaching an advanced dance class on Sundays and so it was just Jared, Jensen and the dogs from then on in.

It was a sunny Sunday in June, the sun was strong enough to burn through some of the haze and smog that hung over LA. Jensen was wearing sunscreen, dozing with his ball cap over his face, Sadie crashed out and panting against his belly.

Jared had just jogged her and Harley around the park, proving that he was still as much of a human garbage disposal as Jensen remembered. Half of the breakfast burritos Jared had got them on the way to the park was enough to have Jensen's stomach ready to explode and him in need of some serious napping.

Jared on the other hand had eaten his, finished off Jensen, washed it down with an extra large coffee and more Krispy Kreme than Jensen thought was healthy. And still he was able to get up and jog the dogs around until they were ready to collapse. Jensen hated him. Just a little.

"I was thinking," Jensen said, opening one eye and squinting at Jared.

"Hope you didn't hurt yourself," Jared teased in return.

"Ha ha," Jensen retorted dryly. "Go Sadie, sic him girl," he tried, but she just lifted her head and gave Jensen a tired huff before settling back on his stomach to sleep.

"Your dog is useless," Jensen pointed out as Jared laughed, hands on his belly as his whole body shook with it and Jensen couldn't help but grin in affection.

"So," Jared prompted once he'd wiped away the tears of laughter out of his eyes. "You were thinking?"

"You should get to know Danneel better," Jensen said carefully. He didn't understand why Jared seemed to have an aversion to Danneel, at least to spending time with her. She was the most important person in Jensen's life right now and he wanted them to get

along, knew they would if Jared just gave her a chance.

“You want to bring her along next Sunday?” Jared asked and Jensen didn’t need to see his frown, could hear it in his voice.

“No,” Jensen assured, shaking his head. Sunday was their thing now and as much as he loved Danneel, he didn’t want to share the little amount of time he had with Jared with anyone, not even her. “I thought maybe you could come round for dinner, you and Sandy.”

“Like a double date?” Jared laughed.

“Yeah, if it can still be counted as a double date when one of the couples aren’t actually dating.”

“You don’t mind?” Jared asked, head tilting a little.

“I wouldn’t have invited you if I did, would I?” Jensen said softly.

“Okay, yeah, I guess we’d love to,” Jared answered after a moment of thought, grin lighting up his face.

Jensen flashed a smile back at Jared before settling back on the grass, folding his hands behind his head and shutting his eyes against the sun. Jensen was starting to drift off into a light doze, nearly fully digested and content, when Jared spoke.

"I feel like I should invite you and Danneel to the wedding," Jared said thoughtfully, like he almost was speaking to himself. Jensen sat up like a shot, Sadie whimpering out her discontent at the sudden movement.

“What?” Jensen stuttered out, had to be sure he heard Jared right before he started to panic, even though his heart was already racing just at the possibility.

Jared rolled onto his side, looked up at Jensen from underneath his hand shading him from the sun. “I mean, we’re friends aren’t we? We’ve been hanging out for the last couple of months…I feel like I should invite you, and Danneel of course.”

"Don't," Jensen said more sharply than he meant to, but he couldn’t help it. Jared was seriously inviting him to his wedding, asking his ex-boyfriend to watch him get married. He couldn’t do it, he couldn’t stand there and watch the man he still loved marry the woman he moved on with.

Jared visibly tensed, “Jen?”

Jensen sighed, took a deep breath and tried to explain himself, tried not to hurt Jared. "I'd rather you didn't, invite me or Danneel to the wedding."

Jared’s face fell in an instant and Jensen wished he had never asked, so he wouldn’t have to do this. "You don't want to come?"

The guilt was almost unbearable and Jensen was torn between trying to make Jared happy and protecting himself. "If you want me there then I'll come, but please Jay, don't make me come and watch you marry her just because you can."

"Jen," Jared said softly, sitting up to face Jensen. “What are you saying?”

"Don’t get me wrong,” Jensen said, wanted to explain to Jared without having to announce that he was still in love with him. “I'm happy for you, really I am. You've moved on and found someone you can be happy with, someone who treats you the way you deserve. I…,” Jensen breathed, “I don't want you to be unhappy. But, things have changed for me and I would love to be there...but I can’t."

Jared studied Jensen for a long moment before asking, "You mean that? That you're happy for me?"

"Of course I am," Jensen said earnestly. He was, it just wasn’t easy for him.

"You're not going to try and talk me out of marrying Sandy?"

Jensen smiled sadly, "I wouldn't have changed much if I tried that, would I?"

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Jensen was still amazed after all this time of getting to know Danneel exactly how good she looked after spending ten minutes throwing on some seemingly random clothes, scrunching up her hair and retouching her make-up. He’d always been lead to believe, thanks to fighting his momma and sister for the bathroom for hours whenever they were going out, it wasn’t possible for women to get ready that quickly.

It made him feel like a total girl that he was taking longer to get ready than her; something she took great amusement in pointing out as she propped herself up against his doorframe, watching him huff in frustration at his open wardrobe, dressed only in his boxers. Of course, he would have been embarrassed, but he knew she’d seen more than he had on now, and had given up on trying to get to act like she hadn’t.

“Don’t know what to wear?” She asked teasingly, arms crossed over her chest. She was dressed in fitted jeans, her favorite cowboy boots, and a grey sweater, finished off with a matching belt. He hated her, just a little bit, for looking so good.

“I know, I know, you hate me,” she laughed, pushing away from the door and crossing the room to stand next to him and study the contents of the closet as well.

“When did you start reading minds?” Jensen pouted.

“Spotting your sulky face at twenty paces is not mind reading,” she said with a grin, before getting a little serious. “Don’t you think you’re maybe putting too much into this if you’re worried about what to wear?”

Jensen sighed, “Danneel, I do this most mornings.” Ignoring the fact that she really was right, it was just it felt important to impress Jared with his cooking, win Sandy over. What if she hated him? What if she couldn’t see past the old Jensen and demanded Jared cut off contact? As much as Jensen wanted to believe he would win, that Jared wouldn’t take well to being made to choose, he knew he would lose out.

Danneel raised an eyebrow and studied Jensen for a moment, obviously using her freaky lie detector powers. “Really?” She asked a little suspiciously but apparently willing to let it go if Jensen wanted. He did.

Jensen shrugged, focused on the fact that he really did have a clothing crisis most days and felt a little embarrassed. “Well, every day I leave the house, yeah. I mean, my fashion sense refuses to catch up with 2009 and I guess I feel like I should actually start dressing like an adult, instead of wearing Nirvana t-shirts.”

“Do you want to wear a Nirvana t-shirt? Because going back to college, you can probably get away with it. As long as you don’t try and act like you’re still a teenager, which you know, you’re much better at. Otherwise you’re going to look like one of those guys who’s in their thirties but thinks he’s still young enough to get carded…” Danneel paused for a moment, before laughing. “I totally got carried away, didn’t I?”

Jensen chuckled, figured she’d slipped into a rant about some of the guys she worked with, “A little.”

“Okay,” she said, pulling a worn Metallica tour shirt out of the closet and holding it up. “Do you really want to wear this shirt out in public? Or in front of Jared?”

Jensen thought about it for a moment, “No, not really. I guess that doesn’t feel like me anymore…What?” Jensen asked, catching Danneel smiling at him, looking like a proud momma hen.

“Nothing,” she said, smile getting a little wider. “It’s just good to see you like this.”

“What? In my underwear?” Jensen joked and Danneel ignored it, and his discomfort towards praise.

“Knowing what you want. It’s been going on for a while now, but I guess I didn’t want to jinx it.”

“Jinx what?” Jensen asked, feeling genuinely confused.

“You…God, watch me sound like a walking cliché, but you’ve found yourself.”

Jensen frowned and Danneel waved a hand, shushing him before he could even begin. “And don’t even think about giving me that I didn’t lose myself crap, because that’s kinda the whole thing with retrograde amnesia. You’re not the Jensen that I knew and you’re not the Jensen that woke up thinking it was 1998 either. You’ve found a whole new you for 2009 and this one? This one I think I like the best,” she said, with a loving smile before kissing him on the cheek.

Going from serious to light hearted in almost an instant, she smacked him on the ass with a grin before pulling out a black button from the closet and the pair of jeans she had bought him. “I think you should wear this, but of course, it’s up to you.”

She pressed a quick kiss to his cheek before laying the clothes on the bed and leaving him alone. Though she called to him as he footsteps thumbed down the stairs, “But don’t take forever! I’m not bailing you out if you burn the dinner.”

Jensen laughed and looked at the outfit Danneel had selected for him. It had been sitting in the closet since they went shopping before his trip back to Texas and he’d always resisted wearing it. Though thinking about it, he didn’t really know why. If anything it was just the vestiges of the old him that thought it was too close to being adult or smart, that it wasn’t him. Danneel was right, she nearly always was, but she was especially right about him being different to the Jensen she remembered and the one he remembered.

Dressed in the clothes Danneel had picked for him and a pair of boots instead of his battered sneakers Jensen entered the kitchen to find Danneel bent over the oven, checking on dinner’s progress. “How’s it looking?” He asked, making her jump.

Standing upright Danneel put her hands on her hips and wolf whistled, eyes teasing. “Looking good.”

Jensen’s nose wrinkled and mentally he blamed the flush of heat on his cheeks on the hot air that had just come out of the open oven. “Not me, dinner!”

“Prude,” she said with a grin as she passed him, starting to collect items to set the table.

“I hate you,” Jensen said with affection, moving over to the stove to do his own check on the food. He wanted it to be perfect.

The doorbell rang and for a moment Jensen thought he might actually hyperventilate, but then Danneel announced she would get it and Jensen could breathe again. He could do this, he could totally have dinner with his ex-girlfriend, his ex-boyfriend and his new fiancé.

Jensen laughed to himself, didn’t care that if anyone heard they’d think he was crazy. He

must have been for thinking that this dinner was a good idea.

“Come on through,” Danneel’s voice rang out, perhaps a little louder than it needed to be, but it did its job and gave Jensen enough warning to pull himself together.

Jensen had the water for the pasta on to boil when Danneel entered the kitchen, Jared and Sandy behind him.

“Hey Jensen,” Jared said with a grin, not letting go of Sandy’s hand as he stepped forward to give Jensen a firm, but one armed hug. “Didn’t think you knew what a kitchen was for.”

Jensen chuckled softly and Danneel behind him snorted out a laugh, “Still doesn’t know what a sink’s for.”

“You want a terrible but accidental case of food poisoning?” Jensen teased, to which Danneel just tutted in response as she flicked her hair.

“So, Jared, Sandy, would you like a drink? We have a bottle of red open, though there is a white in the fridge if you’d rather.”

Jensen collected the fresh pasta out of the fridge along with the bottle of white wine, as requested by Sandy, passed the wine to Danneel and headed around the island to the stove.

“You can’t burn pasta, can you?” Jared asked, making Jensen jump, a smile in his voice.

Jensen looked over his shoulder and smirked, “You could.”

“Hey!” Jared protested and Jensen didn’t need to be looking at his face to know the affronted look Jared was sporting. Jensen just smiled to himself, emptied the pasta into the boiling water and gave it a quick stir, making sure it was all covered. “You know,” Jared said after a moment, voice soft but serious, “You didn’t have to invite Sandy.”

“Of course I did,” Jensen replied, turning to look at Jared. “She’s you fiancé.”

“I just don’t want things to be awkward for you,” Jared said in response, moving a step closer to Jensen, voice still hushed.

Jensen sighed softly, slumping back against the counter next to the stove, “Jay, pretty soon you’re going to be married and she’ll be your wife. If we’re going to be friends, then I have to be okay with that.”

“Are you?” Jared asked intensely and Jensen was caught for a moment, almost blurted out of course I’m not, that should be me.

Instead he smiled the best he could and promised, “I will be.” He had to be.

Jared’s eyes were sad, despite the best attempt at smiling like nothing was bothering he was making. “I wish-,” Jared started but was cut off by a high pitched and excited squeal that did not come from Danneel.

“Oh my god, it really is you!” Sandy gushed. Her hands flailing at the picture of Danneel with the rest of the One Tree Hill cast stuck to the fridge with sticky tack, next to a note in magnets warning Jensen not to mix the colors and the whites.

Danneel laughed, cheeks flushing red just a little has he and Jared turned to look at her and Sandy, who continued. “My roommate, before I moved in with Jared, loved this show. I just thought you looked really like, well, you!”

Jared frowned, looked surprised, “Wait, you’re on TV?” He asked Danneel before turning to Jensen, “Why didn’t you tell me she was on TV?”

Jensen laughed and Danneel took a large gulp of wine. She still wasn’t that used to having people recognize her, so Jensen figured it must have been a bit creepy to have someone fangirling her in their home. “I told you she was an actress,” Jensen pointed out.

Sandy must have picked up on Danneel’s discomfort as she took a deep breath and shook out her hands before saying with an embarrassed smile, “Okay, I promise I’m done being a dork now. No more acting like a crazy fan.”

That seemed to break what ever tension there had been building in the room, Danneel laughed and smiled wide, passing Jared and Sandy their glasses of wine and offering them seats on the barstools around the island, while Jensen removed two small loaves of homemade garlic and mozzarella ciabatta from the oven.

“You can go into the dinning room, if you want,” Jensen offered as he set the bread, now sliced and stacked on a plate in the middle of the island, laughing as Jared’s stomach rumbled.

“What?” Jared laughed, a little guiltily, “I’m hungry.”

“You’re always hungry,” Sandy said, beating Jensen to the friendly jibe, words still on the tip of his tongue as she giggled.

“We’re just fine here,” Danneel said with a knowing smile. “After all, dinner is about being sociable, nothing sociable about you being in here on your own.”

Jensen smirked, checking on the pasta a final time before taking a seat at the island, glass of barely touched wine in his hand. “If you distract me and it’s ruined, I’m not taking the blame you know,” he said, taking a piece of bread and ignoring the way it burnt his fingers before he dropped it on the plate Danneel slid in front of him.

“It’s hot,” Jared said with a cheeky grin as Jensen sucked his thumb between his lips, cooling the sting.

“Oh really?” Jensen snarked through the digit and Jared’s head tilted back, exposing the long line of neck Jensen used to love to bite, as he laughed.

Jensen flipped Jared the bird, Sandy sniggered and Danneel elbowed Jensen lightly in the ribs, muttering, “Children.”

Jensen laughed, leaned over and licked her ear, ignoring her protests of him being gross as he pulled away and took a cheerful bite of his creation. “Mmmm,” he hummed around it, watching the way she wiped at her ear.

“What ever he tells you about having grown up, it’s all lies,” Danneel announced to Jared and Sandy, before giving Jensen a pointed look. He just grinned back, she still loved him.

“I see why he likes you so much,” Jared said to Danneel with a soft smile.

She started to flush a little, covered her embarrassment with a joke, “I’m not sure if that’s a compliment or an insult.”

Jared choked on the large piece of bread he’d folded into his mouth, attempted to say something in reply with a flap of his hands that just came out as a food muffled mumble.

Sandy rolled her eyes and slapped Jared’s arm, before saying to Danneel, “What he’s trying to express is that it was a compliment, not an insult.” Then she turned to Jensen with a long suffering grin, “Has he always done that?”

“Yes.” Jensen nodded, grinned remembering all the methods Jared’s momma had used to try and teach her always hungry son some form of table manners. Eventually she had given up trying and Jensen had pretty much learned to sit next to instead of opposite Jared at meals whenever it was likely that he would get excited and or talkative, wherever possible. “His momma gave up when were…what was it, Jay, eleven?”

“I hate you,” Jared pouted before putting another piece of bread in his mouth, making a show of chewing loudly but with his mouth closed.

“If I were you, I’d save yourself the stress and just invest in an apron,” Jensen said in a conspiratorial stage whisper.

Jensen laughed as Jared flipped him the bird in response, tutted as he slid off his stool and made his way back to the stove. “No originality, either.” Jensen caught himself before he said don’t know what I saw in him and was glad he had his back to the room as he mouthed ‘fuck’.

“This is nearly ready,” Jensen announced, focusing on not screwing up their meal instead of exactly what he did see in Jared, then and now. “Danni, you want to take them into the dinning room and I’ll be through in a minute.”

Danneel nodded and with the help of Sandy collected up everything that was on the table, Jared however stayed in the kitchen, despite her call of, “Jared? Are you coming?”

“I’m gonna help Jensen,” Jared called to her retreating back as Jensen moved around the kitchen, collecting the things he needed.

“You don’t have to, I’ve got it covered,” Jensen said softly. Despite all the time they’d spent together over the last couple of months it felt weird, wrong even, to be in here with Jared when his fiancé was next door. Jensen guessed it must have been harder for his subconscious to pretend that Jared was free and Jensen had a chance when she wasn’t so close by.

“You don’t have four hands,” Jared pointed out with a grin and Jensen glared a little at him as he served up the drained pasta into four dishes.

“My legs won’t fall off if I make two trips,” Jensen replied, removing the tray of roasted vegetables from the oven, shortly followed by the tray of chicken stuffed with sundried tomato’s and gruyere, wrapped in pancetta.

“You know, I’m pretty impressed,” Jared said with a grin as Jensen finished serving up onto the four dishes.

Jensen looked up at Jared and said knowingly, “But?”

Jared giggled as he picked up two of the plates, “Let’s hope it tastes as good as it looks.”

“You’re going to pay for that, fuckface,” Jensen threatened as he picked up the remaining two plates and led Jared through to the dinning room where Sandy and Danneel were already sitting opposite each other.

Danneel topped off the wine as they set the plates down and grinned at Jensen as he slid into the seat next to her. “This looks really good.”

They settled into an easy and relaxed conversation as they ate, staying on safe topics such as Jared’s pet stores and his plans to open a pet adoption and re-housing center, and Sandy’s work as a dance teacher. Sandy made an obvious effort not to ask Danneel about acting, but Jared asked her how she got into the business, which was easier footing for her. Jensen for the most part, let the conversation stay away from talking about him, but answered Sandy’s occasional questions about Jared growing up. It was safe all round, before Jensen’s memory loss and before he and Jared started dating. Nothing to make anyone uncomfortable about, except maybe Jared when it came to what he was doing that made him fall out the tree and break his arm the second time.

“Really?” Sandy giggled, gasping for breath as she looked at Jared who was currently attempting to continue eating and glare at both Jensen and Sandy in contempt. “Is that why you’d never tell me how you broke your arm?”

“She was pretty hot, at the time,” Jensen conceded. Jared had fallen out of the tree because he’d been trying to watch Natalie Jordan, his next-door neighbor and wet dream material through her bedroom window while she’d been getting changed. His older brother Jeff had caught him and the surprise had caused him to loose his grip and end up with a broken arm and a nasty concussion.

Doped up on Vicodin, fourteen year old pride and horniness, that night when Jensen was sat on Jared’s bed getting an action replay, he had declared it totally worth it. Jensen was jealous, not that he would have admitted it to Jared.

“So, how did you two meet?” Danneel enquired softly at Sandy, when her and Jensen had stopped laughing and Jared had stopped pouting. Jensen tried to glare at her subtly in response, felt his mood shift dramatically and tried not to let it show. Just because she knew all the things Jensen was curious about didn’t mean she should ask. Didn’t mean Jensen was ready to hear the answers.

“It’s totally not exciting,” Jared answered instead, which earned him a surprised glance from his fiancé.

She brushed it off with a smile at Danneel and told them anyway. “My roommate had this cat and it attacked everything. After it’d clawed two cat beds and a climbing post to shreds, it started on the couch. I ended up in Jared’s store after work looking for something to save us from having to replace the couch. Jared ended up giving me some really good advice on how to deal with the fur ball from hell. I went back two days later to buy a cat toy and to ask him out.”

“I told you it wasn’t very exciting,” Jared said before taking a drink of his wine.

“How did you and Jensen meet?” Sandy asked, looking between them.

Jared visibly winced, chastised softly, “Sandy!”

“What?” Sandy asked Jared, frown furrowing her brows. Danneel meanwhile squirmed a little in her seat, Jensen hadn’t admitted it to her but he remembered the first time they met. So he knew why she didn’t want to answer, and he didn’t want her to either.

“I don’t remember,” Jensen announced before the tension building on either side of the table could get any worse and before Danneel said anything. Jensen tapped the side of his head, “Y’know, the amnesia.”

It had the desired effect, Sandy’s eyes went wide and she heaved in a sharp breath as she

dropper her cutlery, hand clapping to her mouth as it fell open. “Oh god, I am so sorry. I just didn’t think. You knew each other before?”

Danneel nodded, visibly relaxed and Jensen felt some tension seep out of his shoulders that he hadn’t realized was there. “Yeah, we went out for a while, but I think we both agree that we’re better off as friends, right?” She said looking at Jensen with a smile that Jensen expected to be sad, but was happy to find that it wasn’t.

He grinned back at her. “Much better off.”

There was a long moment of silence in which Sandy watched them with a warm smile and Jared’s eyes flicked between him and Danneel, the emotion in them intense but unidentifiable to Jensen. He wanted to label it as jealously, or something close, but knew better than that, not to find things that weren’t there. Then Jared met his eyes, caught him looking and for a long moment all there was in the room was him and Jared.

“You know what, I’ve got to be the first to say, that was awesome,” Jared said, breaking the moment, hand waving over is empty plate. “When did you learn to cook?”

“The last couple of months, really,” Jensen said softly as Sandy murmured her agreement with Jared, trying to shake off the tension that had built in his shoulders.

Danneel laughed, “I told him that if I was going to be out at work all day, the least he could do was cook my meals. I didn’t expect him to take me seriously, but now he’s better than me at most things.”

“That’s only because you won’t share your family secret to good Louisiana cooking,” Jensen with an exaggerated pout aimed at her before he turned his attention back to the table. “But it has been a good way to pass the time.”

“It must be hard, trying to find a job in your situation,” Sandy said without any kind of malice and Jensen wanted to hate her for it, but couldn’t.

Jensen nodded, swallowed before answering, he figured now was as good a time as any to tell Jared. “I imagine it would be, if I was looking for any kind of proper work, but for now I’m getting ready to go back to college.”

“College?” Jared grinned, eyes lighting up. “Really? Wow, Jen, I’m so proud of you,” he gushed, reaching across the table to squeeze Jensen’s hand.

Jensen felt himself blush, looked down at the table unable to stand everyone’s attention focused on him, even if it was good attention for a change. Danneel put her arm around him, rubbed up and down his bicep as she hugged him gently, “Don’t go getting shy on us.”

“What are you going to study?” Sandy asked, with a smile that seemed a little strained as

she watched Jared out the corner of her eye.

“I’ll be majoring in journalism,” Jensen explained, unable to stop himself from grinning. It felt so foreign to be proud of his adult self, of something he had achieved and he didn’t want to let the feeling go. “Berkley was really impressed by my entrance essay and the interview went really well, one of the admissions board reads my column.”

“Your column?” Jared and Sandy asked together, staring at Jensen in shock.

Jensen flushed again and Danneel smacked him lightly on the arm, scolding: “You didn’t tell him?”

Jensen shook his head, “I’ve been writing a column online since just after Christmas. When they started talking about actually printing it, not just putting it online, I decided to try for college and actually make a career of it.”

“And the rest,” Danneel prompted.

“There’s more?” Jared grinned and it made Jensen warm inside, to see Jared happy for him, proud of him again.

“They’re sponsoring my college application, I have to keep a good GPA, and if I do they’ll guarantee me an internship and when I graduate I’ll have a job with one of their offices.”

“What paper?”

Jensen beamed, “The Times. I might even get some choice about which office.”

“Holy shit!” Jared gasped, and then was out of his seat and pulling Jensen up and out of his and into a crushing hug. “I’m so proud of you,” Jared said into Jensen’s neck and he could feel the way he was beaming. “I always knew you had it in you.”

“Thanks Jay,” Jensen replied, let himself hug Jared back just for a couple of seconds, before letting go and pulling back.

“I think this deserves another bottle of wine, don’t you?” Danneel said with a grin, getting up and heading for the kitchen without waiting for an answer. When she returned she had a grin and a bottle of champagne in her hand, “Oh look what I found,” she announced with a laugh.

“That wasn’t in the fridge earlier…” Jensen frowned, he totally would have noticed a bottle of Crystal in there when he was trying to find the sun dried tomatoes.

“I have my secret hiding places,” she said with a smirk, before offering the bottle to Jared. “Would you do the honors while I get some glasses?”

“Sure.” Jared agreed, taking the bottle and grinning wide at Jensen as he peeled off the foil. A couple of minutes and Danneel had four champagne flutes on the table and Jared had the bottle open with a pop of the cork.

Once they all had a glass Danneel smiled sweetly and raised hers. “I believe that God gives second chances to those who need them. Jensen was given one and I don’t think anyone could have done better with it. Cheers.”

Jensen blushed as their glasses met with a soft clink, and took a sip. “Thank you.”

“Nothing to thank me for,” Danneel said, resting her hand on Jensen’s. Jared across the table, beamed with pride, eyes never leaving Jensen.

“You really didn’t have to do that, in there,” Jensen said to Danneel later, once they were alone in the kitchen loading the dirty plates into the dishwasher.

“Yeah, I know,” she said with a shrug, shutting the machine as Jensen propped himself up against the counter. “But I wanted to and you deserved it.”

“No I-,” Jensen started but Danneel cut him off in an instant.

“Don’t you dare say that you didn’t, because you really did,” She scolded with a smile, but voice serious. “I meant what I said about God giving second chances. He gave you a second chance and you didn’t waste it.”

“Danni,” he tried to stop her, but she just shook her head and let her continue.

“You could have easily laid down and given up, fallen back into the way you used to be when your memory started to come back. You didn’t. Instead, you dusted yourself off and got your shit together, and here you are. You’ve turned yourself around and you’re starting to be happy, really happy, and if that doesn’t deserve celebrating, then nothing does.”

“You do realize you deserve at least half the credit,” Jensen said with a soft smile, pulling her close so she couldn’t escape her share of the praise.

“Don’t be an ass.” She said but she wasn’t fooling Jensen for a minute.

“You didn’t need to stick by me after the accident, if you’d been sensible you wouldn’t have,” Jensen told her, before adding softly, “I’m glad you did.”

“Well, when they write a book about how amazing your rise to success was ten years in the future, I expect at least several chapters devoted to how amazingly awesome I am,” She said with a laugh and a smile and Jensen hugged her tight.

Releasing her she beamed at him before pushing him towards the door, “Go on, go play host, this is your party. I’ll finish up in here and get the coffee on.”

Jensen chuckled to himself as he made his way through the house, back down the hallway to the dinning room. About to push the door open and step inside he stopped at the sound of Sandy’s voice, hushed and what Jensen thought was sad.

“You really are proud of him, aren’t you?”

Jensen’s whole body froze up. She was talking about him.

Jensen knew he should move, make some noise to give some warning and push the door open. Not stand there and listen to what they were saying about him. But then Jared spoke.

“Of course I am,” he said, his voice so full of pride and affection that no matter how much Jensen told himself to move, he couldn’t. He just needed to listen to a little more.

Jensen was glued to the spot, barely breathing and listening hard as Sandy asked: “Should I be concerned?”

“Concerned,” Jared replied in an instant. “What do you mean?”

Jensen was sure he heard Sandy sigh before she asked, voice more confident than Jensen would have thought it would be. “Should I be jealous, Jared?”

“No!” Jared exclaimed loudly.

Sandy shushed him and when he continued, Jensen had to strain to hear him at first. “No, you don’t need to be. I’m just happy for him, you know. He used to be so brilliant, Sandy, like you wouldn’t believe. Not that he ever realized it.”

Jensen swallowed and felt his hands start to shake a little. This was the sort of thing he had never taken well, not after years of being written off by his dad as useless. It was even harder to listen to now, knowing he’d become exactly what his dad had predicted of him. Mostly, because it was Jared and he wouldn’t say it if he didn’t mean it.

“Still, I knew that he was going to be awesome, that he could be if he just applied himself, but he didn’t. I don’t know what happened at college, maybe it was me, maybe I put too much pressure on him. I don’t know, but he just stopped trying, stopped caring and that’s when everything started to go wrong. For him and for us.”

“Oh, baby,” Sandy said softly and Jensen hated in her that moment, just for being able to be there with Jared when it should have been him. When it needed to be him in there, assuring Jared that it wasn’t his fault. It was Jensen’s.

“It’s okay, really, it is. He was my best friend…he still is. I want him to be happy and it really looks like he is.”

“Can you do that? Can you just be friends with him?” Jensen was sure he wasn’t imagining the suspicious, slightly accusatory note in Sandy’s voice.

“Sandy? What are you saying?” Jared asked, obviously he heard it too, or he wouldn’t have sounded so wounded. “Of course I can just be friends with him, I’m with you.”

There was a long pause and Jensen was desperate to see what was going on, to be able to read Jared’s body language, try and see if he was telling the truth.

Jensen was about to step in, put an end to the conversation and his curiosity when Sandy spoke again. She was so close to the truth that Jensen forgot to breathe waiting for Jared’s response.

“I think he would be happier if he was with you.”

“Don’t say that,” was what Jared said and Jensen couldn’t stop the pain in his chest Jared’s firm tone caused.

“You don’t want me to say it because it’s true and you know it is,” Sandy argued and Jensen couldn’t have walked in there and stopped her even if he wasn’t morbidly curious as to what else she thought.

“Just because he’s found something to do with his life doesn’t mean that he doesn’t love you. He lost his memory to a time when things were still good between the two of you. You really think he could just switch his feelings off because he found out what happened in the gap?”

“We’re just friends,” Jared assured and Jensen’s throat went dry.

“I know you are…I’m just. I know you never really stopped loving him. I knew it even before I knew who it was, that you still had feelings for someone else. I was okay with that, all the time you were so mad you thought you hated him. I never felt threatened and I guess, I see the way you look at him and now I do.”

“Sandy, that’s not true. If I didn’t love you, I wouldn’t be marrying you. You make me happy.”

Jensen swallowed, couldn’t listen anymore because Jared was happy with Sandy. Even though Jensen had heard him say it before, it wasn’t until that moment that he really believed it, and understood what it meant. No matter what Sandy seemed to think Jared felt for him, she was wrong.

Jared was happy with Sandy and he was going to marry her. Jared wouldn’t still be

planning their wedding if he had any doubts about his feelings for her. Jensen being in Jared's life was just making Sandy insecure and feeding unfounded hopes that Jensen couldn't stop himself from having. Most of all, he was stopping himself from moving on. There was no hope for him and Jared, there had never been.

Jensen could, and would, find someone new. Fall out of love with Jared, move on and be happy with someone else. He had put everything else in his life back together, he would be able to do this too.

He had to let go of the past, and that meant letting go of Jared. Until Jensen could put his feelings for Jared to rest, they couldn't be friends. Not if they were both going to be happy.

This was it. He would say goodbye to Jared when he left for Berkley and that would be it.

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"Hey," Jared greeted with a wide grin as he slid into the booth opposite Jensen. "Where have you been dude, I've been getting you and Danneel's voicemail for like, two weeks now."

"Sorry," Jensen said guiltily. After their dinner together Jensen had been unable to face Jared again, or even speak to him, not knowing what he was going to do; that very soon he was going to have to say goodbye to Jared and he couldn't draw it out. Instead, he'd hidden until he had the courage to do what had to be done. "Me and Danneel have been apartment hunting in San Francisco."

Jared looked at Jensen intensely for a moment and Jensen hoped that his words were close enough to the truth for Jared not to think them a lie. "I was worried about you."

Jensen felt the weight, heavy in the bottom of his stomach start to churn, making him feel sick. "It was pretty last minute, I had a place in student accommodation on campus, but Danneel decided she wanted somewhere to stay so she can visit when she's not filming so we're getting something together, getting it ready to live in over the summer."

"Does it feel weird?" Jared asked after a long moment's silence in which Jensen was lost, unable to work out what Jared was thinking.

"What do you mean?"

"Moving to San Francisco, with Danneel…when," Jared swallowed, a flash of something in his eyes Jensen wished he understood. "When it was supposed to be us?"

"Of course it does," Jensen answered softly, chest aching. There was nothing he wouldn't give, including his memory again, to have a second chance with Jared. To move to San Francisco with him and chase all the dreams they'd once had, but that was never going to

happen. They could never go back to the way things had been, Jared had moved on and Jensen had promised himself he would do the same.

Life at Berkley was going to be nothing like his life would have been with Jared. Like it had been at college. He wouldn't have Jared.

Jensen wanted to say more, but couldn't. Didn't have the heart to say everything he was thinking to Jared, even if he did ask for it. Instead, he took a drink from the coffee in front of him, tried to find the right words to tell Jared that this was it.

Instead, Jared spoke, fidgeting in his seat and sounding mournful. "It's going to be weird, not having you around anymore, not getting coffee on Thursday nights."

Jensen took a deep breath; this was it, what he came here to do. "I think it's maybe for the best, Jared."

Jared stared at Jensen for what seemed like an eternity, frown slowly furrowing his eyebrows before he leaned forward in his seat, face confused as he asked: "What do you mean?"

"I mean," Jensen said, trying to stop his voice from shaking, eyes fixed on the chipped rim of his coffee cup, "after this I don't think we should be in contact anymore."

"What? Why?" Jared asked, voice low but forceful. "For Christ's sake Jensen, look at me," Jared ordered and Jensen obeyed, felt a sting behind his ribs at the almost broken look on Jared's face, the way his voice softened into hurt. "I thought we were getting on, that things were good between us."

"They were, they are, but…," Jensen replied, sighing as he struggled to find the right thing to say, not to hurt Jared anymore. "This, us, it isn't good for me and I don't think it's good for you."

"You're my best friend and I have you back, how can that be anything but good for me?" Jared argued and god, Jensen wished it were that simple. Wished he didn't have to hurt Jared like this, but it was the only way.

"I heard," Jensen confessed.

"Heard what?"

"You and Sandy talking, at dinner."

Jared's eyes widened a little as he sat back in the booth and asked, "What did you hear?"

"She's right, Jay…She's right," Jensen said around the lump rapidly forming in his throat. "I would be happier with you, because I love you. I thought that being friends

would be enough but it's not," this time Jensen didn't even try to control his voice, let it shake and threaten to crack.

"Jensen," Jared said after an audibly faltering inhale. "What are you saying? That you want-?"

"No," Jensen answered instantly, took a breath and tried to explain himself. "Of course I want that, but I know I can't get back what we had," Jensen sighed sadly. "Too much has happened between us and we're not the same anymore. I want the chance to try again, to get things right, but I'm not going to ask for it."

"Why not?" Jared asked, voice shaking.

Jensen swallowed and turned his gaze back down to the table, this was the hard part. "Because you're happy with Sandy. I didn't want to believe it and I don't think I really did until the other night. After everything I did to you, you deserve this, and I want it. I want you to be happy," Jensen said softly, honestly.

"Why can't I be happy with you still in my life?" Jared asked, sounded like a lost little boy, pleading.

Jensen took a deep breath, he knew this wasn't going to be easy but he didn't think it would hurt so much. Maybe this was why he'd give up doing the right thing, because it was so painful. "Because it's not a good idea."

"What?" Jared stuttered out, "Why not?"

Jensen sighed, wished Jared would stop protesting, making Jensen want to question himself. "Did you miss the part where I'm still in love with you?"

"But you don't want to stay?" Jared asked softly and Jensen knew that tone of voice, the hurt and guilt and he needed Jared to know this wasn't his fault.

"I don't want to end up the way I was before," Jensen said softly, leaning across the table and putting his hand over Jared's, squeezed lightly, trying to reassure and make him understand. "And I need to move on, I have this whole new life ahead of me and believe me, I wish you could be in it, but all the time I have feelings for you I'm just going to be held back."

"I'm holding you back?"

"No," Jensen assured, shaking his head. "But my feelings for you are. I don't want to end up resenting you and Sandy again. Instead of trying to get over you, I've been trying to work out how to get you back and I know it's taken me a long time, but I realized that's not what I should be doing."

“Then what are you going to be doing in San Francisco, cutting me out your life?”

“Doing what I should have done a long time ago, when I found out you were with someone else. Getting over you.”

“You can’t just do this,” Jared choked out. “You can’t just come back into my life like the old Jensen and just as things start to get back to normal walk away. It’s not fair.”

“I want you to be happy Jared and with Sandy you are. If I stay around while I still have feelings for you, it’s going to ruin things for you. I don’t want to, I won’t, hurt you again.”

“Don’t I get a say in this?” Jared pleaded.

“You trust me?” Jensen asked softly.

“Yes,” Jared replied in an instant and Jensen wished things didn’t have to be like this.

“You love Sandy?”

“Of course.”

“Want me to be happy?”

“Jen-.” Jared started, but Jensen cut him off.

There really was only one thing left to say. “Then let me do the right thing when it comes to us, for the first time in too long.”

Jared was silent for a long time, just looking down at the tabletop, before he eventually looked up, eyes damp. “I’m going to miss you.”

“I’m going to miss you too, Jay,” Jensen managed to force out, scratchy around the lump in his throat. Leaned across the table and pressed a soft kiss to Jared’s lips, whispered goodbye against them before sliding out of the booth. Ignoring Jared’s call of his name as he left.

He did the right thing for both of them. It hurt like hell, but Jensen just had to remember, he did the right thing.

Big Bang 2009 || Part Eight & Epilogue

Life in San Francisco was different to LA in so many ways, but Jensen had settled into it easily, found a place and a routine in the new city and away from everything he used to know. As long as he ignored the Jared shaped hole in his life, he did fine, great even. On

the occasional off day, when class had been hard or he'd been jarred by a memory he didn't want coming back, when he wanted to pick up the phone and call Jared he reminded himself of Sandy.

It had been six months since Jensen moved from LA to San Francisco, into the run down and unloved Victorian in the Haight-Ashbury district. Jared was married now, Sandy now Mrs Padalecki and they would be living their happy, apple pie lives. Some days Jensen ached to be a part of it. Knew that Jared would be a great dad and their kids would be gorgeous, wanted to be Uncle Jensen playing with them and the dogs in the sun. Jensen liked to kid himself that it would be that easy, even if just for a little while before he remembered why he wouldn't let Danneel give Jared the house number.

It had been over a year since he lost his memory, losing ten years of his life, but Jensen felt content with the way things were moving. He'd picked up a part time job in one of the many curiosity shops that litter Haight-Ashbury, selling bangles and incense and hand made clothes. It was fun and he felt less like he was mooching off Danneel who had been having the house restored since she signed the paperwork. When the kitchen wasn't finished for Thanksgiving she took Jensen home to her parents and for Christmas Jensen cooked in the gleaming new workspace, full of appliances she made him pick.

Whenever Danneel left to go back to work, Jensen always felt a twinge in his chest. He'd made friends in San Francisco, would spend lazy Sundays drinking coffee with them, or hiking in Golden Gate Park, but they weren't her. He loved her like he didn't think he could love someone other than Jared, but he did and sometimes he wished he actually felt something more than affection for her.

Whatever spark had been there before he lost his memory, whatever sexual attraction he had found for her was lost forever. Maybe it was a good thing, at least his friendship with her was safe.

With college, Jensen was only being published once a month, both in print and online, but he was okay with that. He was doing well at juggling college, writing and his part time job. He was excited for his first summer internship once his final exams were finished, though they were still a semester away, urged on by good grades and a genuine pleasure for what he was doing.

He had even started dating again. It hadn't gone anywhere, but it was starting to feel good to have guys interested in him again. And not just in how he looked, but what came out of his mouth as well. He missed Jared, thought that he always would, after all he'd been more than just a boyfriend, he'd been his best friend, his world.

But this was progress and it felt good, like maybe one day he could go back to LA and try the whole friends with Jared thing again.

"So, I was thinking," Alona was beginning to say as Jensen joined a selection of his friends, collectively sprawled across cushions and couches in their favored local café.

“Hey Jellybean!” She greeted as she noticed him, arms reaching up for a hug from her position cross legged on the floor.

Jensen leaned down and hugged her, moved around the rest of his friends, dishing out hugs and kisses, long since given up trying to shift the nickname. Eventually he ended up settled on a couch, half on Misha’s lap with Julie curled up against him.

“As I was saying,” Alona continued, once the fuss over Jensen’s arrival had died down, “I was thinking we should do something this Sunday, you know, other than lay around on our butts.”

“Sunday is the day for lying around on our butts, y’all can be active as you like, but I am parking mine and not moving for anything other than food,” Aldis announced with a grin.

Alona rolled her eyes, “Come on guys, you know if you all agree he’ll fold under the peer pressure!”

“Sorry, I’m with Aldis on this one.” Jensen laughed and ruffled her hair. He kinda adored Alona in a big brother way; he’d met her through Danneel. Alona and Julie shared an old Victorian in some crazy forward thinking threesome relationship with Misha. Jensen didn’t really understand it, but it seemed to make them all happy so he wasn’t going to judge. Alona used most of the ground floor for the yoga classes she taught daily, which was how she Danneel connected, attending her evening classes to relax after a day of unpacking or painting during the move. “My plans for this Sunday involve not getting out of bed before noon, then maybe stumbling down here while I do some homework.”

“That never gets old, hearing you talk about homework,” Gabe laughed from his position on the opposite couch, feet stretched out over a long suffering Richard’s legs.

Genevieve, the main reason they tended to collect in the café, wandered over with a notepad and a bright smile, “Hey Jensen! How was class?”

“Good thanks, I got back my paper on the effect of blogging on online journalism. Harper gave me an A,” Jensen said with a proud grin. Genevieve was in her final year at Berkley and was always willing to take a break from studying to grab lunch with Jensen, or help him find his way around in the early days. She’d also had taken some classes in her freshman year with Professor Harper and had been happy to give as much advice as he needed on how to get around her harsh marking.

“Ooooh!” She squealed, giving a little jump before rushing over to hug Jensen tightly. “If I didn’t like you so much I’d hate you for being such a smart ass.”

“Is that the paper you spent like, a month bitching about and made us all read for you?” Richard asked, grin in his eyes.

“Alright, yes…” Jensen said with a blush as Genevieve released him to stand up and fix

her shirt and apron. “I may have been a little paranoid about it, but I wouldn’t have done so well if I hadn’t been.”

“What ever you say, Jellybean,” Misha said poking Jensen the side, making him squeak and squirm. Sometimes he really hated Misha, just for being so goddamn smart and good at reading people….and well, him.

As Jensen engaged Misha in a retaliatory fight of who can make the other squeal the loudest, Julie fled to a safe distance and Jensen was vaguely aware of someone clearing their throat and Alona announcing, “Why hello there.”

Jensen looked up from where he was currently pressed face first into the couch by Misha’s body, gasping for breath between manic giggles. Then his whole body tensed and everything stopped.

Jared.

Misha must have felt the tension just seeing Jared sent through his body because he climbed off Jensen and pulled him up into a sitting position as Jensen was still trying to process. Jared. Right there in front of him, in San Francisco, staring at him like he’d just broken his heart.

What the hell was he doing there? And that thought was enough to kick start Jensen’s brain and spur him into action, getting up and saying to his friends, “Excuse me guys.”

Jared looked down at his shoes, feet shuffling as Jensen collected up his college stuff and his jacket before leading Jared by the arm to a table across the room, out of earshot of his friends. The way they all stared at Jensen and Jared, as they walked away, it was obvious they’d worked out who his mystery guest was.

“Jared,” Jensen breathed, still shocked and trying to process him being there, clearly not by accident.

Jared raised his eyes from the floor to look Jensen and he looked…afraid. “Jensen,” he said softly, reaching out to just put his hand on Jensen’s arm, like he was trying to make sure he was real.

The touch sent a spark of electricity through Jensen, made him angry and intense as he demanded in a low voice, “What the hell are you doing here?”

“I came to find you,” Jared answered nervously, eyes flicking between Jensen and his group of friends behind him. “To see you.”

“I got that,” Jensen hissed, a whole fucking whirlwind of emotions picking up inside him. Making him want to kiss Jared and hit him all at the same time. For coming, for not coming sooner, he didn’t know. Everything had been going well and now Jared was here,

stirring up all the feelings he thought he'd been moving on from. Making him have to go back to the start and it wasn't fair.

"I went to your house, but you weren't there. Your next door neighbour said I should try here," Jared explained, hands wedged deep into his pockets instead of waving around in front of him. "I'm sorry for interrupting you and your…" Jared swallowed, voice shaking a little as he asked. "Is he your boyfriend?"

Jensen stared at Jared for a long moment, mouth open before he said, "No." Jared couldn't be doing this, couldn't be here for him, not like that. He was married to Sandy and he was happy. Jensen couldn't stand to have his hopes pulled up again, couldn't want Jared and then let him go to someone else. Knew he didn't have it in him, not again. "You shouldn't have come here…"

"Are you seeing anyone?" Jared asked and Jensen's heart clenched.

"Jared-." Jensen begged. He needed him to stop before six months of life without Jared went down the drain with the sparks of hope Jared was sending through him.

"Please, Jensen, just tell me so I know if I should walk away or not," Jared pleaded, stepping closer to Jensen so he could feel Jared's breath, warm against his cheek.

"What do you mean?" Jensen breathed, knees threatening to buckle and mind spinning having Jared there. Right there in his personal space after so long.

"Are you?" Jared pressed, a little more forceful.

"No, alright?" Jensen asked, forcing himself to take a step back, try and clear his head. "I've been on a couple of dates, but no, I'm not seeing anyone."

"Oh thank god," Jared rushed out, with a huge breath of relief.

Then before Jensen could think, or speak, or even breathe Jared was on him. Pressed up against him, in his space, hands cupping Jensen's face as he kissed him. Jared's lips were soft but persistent against his, and Jensen couldn't help but lean into the kiss and clutch at Jared's shirt.

"No," Jensen said, gasping for air and pushing Jared away, trying to get space to breathe, to think, to pull himself together.

"Jen-" Jared started, voice breathy and kissed out as he reached for Jensen.

"Sandy," Jensen almost shouted, cutting Jared off before he could say or do anymore. God, he was married to Sandy, he shouldn't have chased Jared all the way to San Francisco, shouldn't have kissed him. "You have Sandy, you can't do that."

“I didn’t mean to,” Jared said, holding his hands out to Jensen but not trying to touch this time, still Jensen backed away.

“Then why did you come here?”

Jared sighed, looked guilty as he scratched at the back of his head, messing up his mop of hair. “I think we should sit down and talk.”

“You just kissed me, Jay, I think you should go back to your wife.”

“I don’t have a wife,” Jared said calmly, meeting Jensen’s eyes with a level and honest gaze.

“What?” Jensen gasped, slumping down into the seat next to him as the bottom dropped out of his stomach. Sandy, the engagement, the wedding…What had happened?

Jared pulled the other seat over so he was sitting with Jensen, nothing between them, fumbled for a moment over what to do with hands, reaching for Jensen before pulling away. Finally he settled with them folded together in his lap as he took a deep breath. “This isn’t the way I wanted to do this.”

“I really need some answers,” Jensen said, head spinning with the possibility, the hope that Jared had come for him.

“I just…I saw you with that guy and I was so jealous, I couldn’t help it when you said you weren’t seeing anyone.”

“What about Sandy?”

“I didn’t marry her,” Jared said softly, face guilty as Jensen shook with the shock of the news.

“You didn’t marry her?” He echoed, unable to do anything else. *Oh god oh god oh god* playing through his brain, hoping that maybe just maybe he had a chance. That he wasn’t going to be crushed again.

“I couldn’t,” Jared continued. “Not after…I don’t know when it happened, not really. I guess I didn’t want to face it. I told myself that I didn’t have any feelings for you, that you were just a friend and then you said goodbye to me and you kissed me. And I knew. I knew I had feelings for you…and I tried, Jensen, I really tried to ignore them. You wanted me to be happy with Sandy but I wasn’t, not anymore…and I couldn’t do that to her. Not when I knew I wanted you. Wanted to be with you.”

“You…” Jensen stuttered, trying to process what Jared was saying and failing. Jared wanted him. Jared actually wanted him.

“Two weeks after you left I called off the wedding, I told Sandy the truth and…that I didn’t know what to do. You left, you left me and I didn’t want to hold you back, I didn’t want ruin the new life you were building out here.”

“It’s been six months since we…Why now?” Jensen asked, still dazed and attempting to process what Jared was telling him. Jared had left Sandy, for him.

“I didn’t know what to do…I went and spoke to Chris, he said he hadn’t heard from you in a while, but Danneel said you were doing well. I thought I’d lost my chance, lost you.”

“What changed your mind?”

“I realized somewhere along the line I’d fallen in love with you, that it wasn’t my old feelings for you coming back. It was new ones…I thought about the way I used to hate seeing you with Danneel. I was jealous…Even though I knew there was nothing between you, I was afraid that out here you might...”

Jensen couldn’t help but laugh, winced at the hint of hysteria that tinged it. “You thought I’d find my straight again?”

Jared huffed, cheeks flushing a little, “I know it was pretty stupid…But, I had a long time to think about it, and I couldn’t stop. I started reading your column, trying to work out if you were happy. Then you wrote that article about me….about us on your birthday, turning thirty two and second chances and. I had to come.”

“This is a lot to take in,” Jensen said after a long moment, head still reeling.

“I’m sorry,” Jared said softly, reaching tentatively across the distance, putting hand on Jensen’s.

Jensen looked at their hands together, still felt the spark just from Jared’s touch. Wanted so much, even though his brain was telling him that it wasn’t a good idea, that they’d only end up hurt again.

“I want to be with you,” Jared whispered. “I never stopped loving you.”

“You just couldn’t stand me,” Jensen said, the shame he’d not felt in months rising up like bile in the back of his throat.

“He was a different version of you, this one I can love and live with. I want to.”

“What if I change?” Jensen voiced his biggest fear, the one thing that still woke him up in the night, shaking and scared. That the old Jensen was just waiting around the corner for him.

“You won’t,” Jared assured.

“You can’t know that,” Jensen argued, pulling his hand away from Jared’s.

Jared just smiled, full of so much love it made Jensen’s chest ache. “I can and I do. You don’t want to be him and that’s enough…I know that things aren’t going to be easy and we’re going to need to take things slow, but I want to try…we have to try.”

This is what Jensen had wanted, from the moment he woke up and now that he had Jared here, wanting him, he didn’t know if he could. He had adjusted himself to life without Jared, had convinced himself of all the reasons why they shouldn’t be together and he couldn’t stop them now from bubbling up inside him, screaming what a bad idea it was. “I don’t know if I can…If it doesn’t work, we’re both going to get hurt.”

“You were given a second chance at everything else, Jensen, and look what you made of it…Do the same for us.”

“Jay-,” Jensen breathed, knew Jared was right. That despite everything he had convinced himself, he loved Jared and it was worth the risk. He couldn’t go through giving him up again, couldn’t live with the what if’s of not trying to make things work.

“When you left LA it was because you wanted me to be happy, I can’t, not without you. Not anymore…I don’t think I ever was, not really. I just told myself I was-.” Jared argued, mistaking what Jensen was going to say for another rebuttal.

“Jared,” Jensen said more firmly, reaching across to take Jared’s hands in his. “I love you…and you’re right.”

“I am?”

Jensen nodded, smiled softly. “That night you came to dinner, Danneel said she believed I’d been given a second chance. I’ve turned my life around but I still want, need, you in it.”

“Are you saying…?” Jared asked, hope bright and shinning in his eyes.

Jensen nodded again, “Yeah, I’m saying I want to give this a chance.” Leaning forward, Jensen brushed his lips over Jared’s in a tender kiss.

It wasn’t going to be easy, and Jared was right, they were going to have to take things slow. Work out the logistics between LA and San Francisco and everything else, but it would be worth it. They’d make sure it was.

This was Jensen’s last second chance and he wasn’t going to waste it.

Epilogue

Jensen opened his eyes and squinted up as a shadow stood over him, blocking his light and sending a shiver down his spine. As the shape looming over him came into focus Jensen grinned wide and said, “Hey you.”

“Hey,” Jared beamed back before flopping down onto the grass next to Jensen, settling so his head was cushioned on Jensen’s stomach, laying on his side to look up at him.

Jensen craned his neck to smirk down at him, put his hands behind his head to support the position. “Comfortable there?”

It was Sunday afternoon and Jensen was making the most of the best time of year in San Francisco, stretched out on the grass in front of the Conservatory of Flowers in Golden Gate Park. There was no fog, no rain, nothing but sunshine and a couple of clouds in the sky. It’d last for another week or two if they were lucky and Jensen wasn’t going to waste the only chance he had to get some color in his face before they went to Texas for Christmas.

“Very,” Jared laughed, tilted his head so he could press a kiss to Jensen’s chest through his shirt.

“So,” Jensen prompted. Jared had spent the morning at a brunch meeting trying to convince wealthy San Franciscanites to donate large amounts of money towards helping Jared get a non-kill animal shelter and adoption program off the ground. “Are you going to tell me how it went?”

“I don’t know, they’re thinking about it,” Jared answered, cagier and less enthusiastic than Jensen had expected, though he understood why he was trying to be subdued. He didn’t want to jinx it by being excited to soon.

Jared had spent the last six months making contacts, searching out viable properties and putting together a business plan to get his shelter off the ground. When they had agreed to give it another shot, at first Jared had stayed in LA, travelling up on weekends for dates and just to spend time together. Three months in he had been spending most his time working on getting a San Francisco store open as well as trying to get his shelter plan off the ground, so had moved into a small apartment in North Beach.

Jared had left the three pet stores in LA under the care of a regional manager he’d hired just for the job, packed up the dogs and sold his and Sandy’s house in LA, splitting the money with her. Even with Jared in the city they’d taken things slowly, still learning each other all over again, and all the new bits in between. They hadn’t been ready to try and live together again, everything still tentative and new and Jensen was finally starting to settle into the relationship, be less afraid that he was going screw things up.

“I did, however, get to read your article,” Jared said, rolling over onto his stomach and

shimmying up Jensen's body, settling on top of him, pressed together from chest to toes.

"You did?" Jensen grinned, but flushed, he knew Jared read everything he wrote that got published, would read everything that didn't if Jensen would let him. It still made him shy to know that he did, unable to let go of the niggling doubt that Jared might not like it, couldn't believe it when he did.

"Uh-huh," Jared said, nuzzling at the curve of Jensen's neck like one of his puppies. "You were having some serious thinky thoughts when you wrote that, weren't you?"

"Thinky thoughts?" Jensen laughed, ran his fingers through Jared's hair. "I don't believe that's an actual term, love."

"Totally is," Jared argued, laughing as he nipped at the curve of Jensen's jaw.

"Was there a point to your observation or were you just looking for a chance to use incorrect English at me?"

"My point is," Jared said, kissing Jensen softly, "that I really love you."

Jensen smiled back up at Jared, stroked his hand down his face lovingly, "You know I'm never going to get tired of you saying that."

Jared grinned, "But more than that, your amnesia, it's the best thing that ever happened to me too."

"Jay," Jensen breathed, almost lost for words.

Jared leaned down to kiss Jensen again, long and slow and lazy, before pulling away and smiling happily. "I have been in love with you since I remember knowing you and I never wanted to give you up."

"But you had to, I know, I understand…I don't know how you put up with me as long as you did. You don't need to explain it."

"But I want to," Jared said softly, shushing Jensen with a finger pressed lightly over his lips. "I think so many things went wrong with us, and it wasn't just you that made mistakes, it was me as well. I don't even know if we were ready for living together, for everything we did when we did it. I think I let you get away with things for too long and maybe before that I put too much pressure on you, I don't know. I do know that things went so wrong and neither of us did anything to stop it, worse than that, we let things get so bad between us that we couldn't stop it, couldn't go back. Without this, without your amnesia we never could have had each other back, had this."

"Move in with me," Jensen said softly, flooded by a wave of love for Jared, for them.

“Seriously?”

Jensen nodded, grinned wide, “Seriously, if you want to that is. It’s just, we’ve been doing this for six months and I think we’re ready. It’s a big house, between work and college we won’t be living in each others pockets and there’s real space for the dogs.”

“Jen,” Jared hushed him with a kiss, “You don’t need to sell me on it.”

“I don’t?”

Jared laughed and shook his head, “I think we’re ready.”

Today seems like a good one to be a little introspective. As I sat here, wondering what I should write about this week I realized that when this is printed it’ll be exactly two years since I lost my memory. For those of you who are new to my readership, I should briefly explain. In November 2008 I hit my head, which doesn’t sound like a big deal on the surface, but when I woke up I thought it was 1998 and there was a ten year gap in my brain. I thought Clinton was still in office, I didn’t remember turning thirty and I had retrograde amnesia.

The last two years have been damn hard work but I don’t think I would change them for anything in the world. I’m sure many of you will be surprised to hear, but as I look back on not just the last two years, but what I now remember of the ten I lost, amnesia for me was a blessing.

I still don’t understand how amnesia works, I’m sure that most doctors don’t really understand it either. The fact is that when I lost my memory, I wiped out everything that I’d done wrong, took myself back to a time when me and my partner were happy, I was doing well in school and everything was right in the world. The more that comes back to me, the more I begin to understand that 1998 was the year that everything started to go wrong for me. Mentally, I was young and idealistic again, full of hopes and dreams, completely unaware that I had screwed them all up. When reality hit, it was a hard and painful crash into the sidewalk from a thirty story drop.

My best friend Danni likes to say that my amnesia was me being given a second chance. I don’t know if it was god or fate or luck, but the better my life gets the more I believe it. Of course, when the amnesia was new and I didn’t know the extent of what I’d lost, of who I’d become, I rejected the idea out of hand. Then the ten years started to come back, along with everything I’d done during them, and I wondered how I’d let myself get that way. How I’d never realized what a mess I was making of everything I’d touched.

Then around about the time I remembered giving my partner’s fiancé a copy of our sex tape as a congratulation present I stopped falling and hit the ground.

Where am I now? Well, I would hope it's obvious that I'm doing much better since my accident. I'm in my second year at Berkley as a Journalism major, I have supportive friends, a house we just finished renovating and most importantly, I have my partner back. The person I'd driven away is back with me, giving me the second chance I never thought I'd have and I'm not going to waste it.

I suppose there should be a moral to this piece, to make it more than a self indulgent look at how far the last two years have brought me. I'm not sure if I should go with: don't waste a second chance when you're given it or perhaps something that doesn't sound like it came out of a fortune cookie. What the last two years has taught me, aside from regret and a large amount of humility, is to step back and look at my life objectively.

Sometimes it takes a devil to make things right.

The End.